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By M. CONSTANTIN-WEYER

TRANSLATED BY
SLATER BROWN

A MAN SCANS HIS PAST

[UN HOMME SE PENCHE SUR SON PASSÉ]

NEW YORK
THE MACAULAY COMPANY

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INTRODUCTION

"I am prey," writes the author of this novel, "to a vast ambition. I wish to paint as many fragments as possible of a vast fresco of Canada."

This present volume, which was recently awarded the most sought-after literary prize in France, is one of the author's major contributions toward his Homeric plan.

And Homeric this novel is. For in this bright panorama of the Northwest with its prairies and snowy lands, its forests, streams and mountains, Constantin-Weyer has always kept Man in the foreground. We see him struggling here for existence against cold, drouth, hunger, weariness. We see him struggling with his passions, with desires, lust, love, hate. We see him struggling with other men, and with women. But against the blinding background of snow, Man cannot be painted in delicate colors and outlines; he must be painted as something stark. He must be seen in heroic proportions for otherwise he becomes a lost thing in the infinite expanse of prairies and barren lands.

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It is in stark and simple outlines that Constantin-Weyer conceives the drama of this novel. It is not a book of introspection, of subtle analysis; it is a novel of struggle in the simplest, in even the crudest terms. It is a novel of fighting, of hunger, and of love.

Perhaps someone might protest that this has been done before, that it has been done too often. But it must be realized by English readers that Constantin-Weyer is French. He enters the realms of the Northwest with new eyes. And with these sharp and extremely individual eyes of his, Constantin-Weyer interprets the Northwest for us in terms that are strikingly alive and fresh. The design and color of his fresco have none of that literary pallor from which too many of our own romances of the Northwest suffer.

Romance must continually return to reality for new blood. Without this continual return, romance loses its meaning and its vitality. It becomes a bloodless body of dim and lifeless forms, of stereotyped incidents and language. It becomes an industry of rubber stamps.

It is the stereotype that Constantin-Weyer seeks to avoid. And for that reason he has dipped into reality at its source. As farmer, trapper, woodsman, horse-trader, fur-trader he lived in Canada for fourteen

years. He saw the Northwest in its every phase. But he saw it not as a writer would, he saw it as a man of action. "I was too caught up by the fever of fast moving life," he himself has said, "to think of placing it upon paper." Like our own Jack London he saw life from within.

But the importance of this novel is not only due to the fact that it was written by a man of action; it was also written by a man who writes well. For Constantin-Weyer writes as the grass grows. And he has written about the Northwest because he found the soil fertile there, and the seed good.

THE TRANSLATOR.

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A MAN SCANS HIS PAST

CHAPTER ONE

The Death of the Prairie

A MAN scans his past! As short as my past was in reality, I considered it infinite. It was spent on two continents. Were the sequence of events reversed I would find myself traveling on horseback over the Canadian Prairies, on snow-shoes over the bleak lands of the north, on a ship across the Atlantic, on bicycles or afoot along the poplar shaded roads of Lorraine. I would be carried back to the home of my childhood, warm or cool according to the season I imagined it. . . . But I regret nothing, nothing!

My past was so varied that it could not serve in depicting what my future would be. At best it could only help me to understand the present. Occasionally with closed eyes I imagined a trip to France where I would again see all the people and things that I had loved. But when the time came for me to leave I would hunger after something new. For though my Canadian life from year to year was changeless —selling horses in summer and buying furs in win-

ter—it always provided me with that something new I longed for. It was a periodic repetition within a changeless frame, but unforeseen events followed on each other's heels.

In those days I and Napoleon Brazeau, who was my helper, had sturdy horses to ride on, the vast Prairie, and the wind which forced us to lean forward in our saddles, but which made us laugh too. . . . That was our present. . . . We also had a future. I do not know what Napoleon pictured his to be; not very different, I imagine, from his present. As to my future, it really seemed so complex that I did not think of it except as wealth in reserve. It was perhaps great wisdom that counseled me to live only in the past and present.

To both of us the present meant the joy of riding. I have already mentioned our sturdy broncos and the gales of wind that swept across the Prairie, raising clouds of dust and forcing us to bend, helpless but laughing, over our horses' necks. And who knows whither the wind carried the delicate footprints of a little half-wild bronco?

Half wild? Napoleon was as untamed as his horse, and I hardly less so myself. The mirror of the bar in Butte, Montana, riddled by the bullets of drunken cowboys, had reflected my image only recently. Lean and muscular, blond, but with my

face, my arms and hands so tanned by cold, snow, sun and drouth, that my reflection really seemed to be that of an old smoky kettle. Dressed in cowboy costume, I wore a large gray sombrero, a black sateen shirt, a red bandana about my neck, and a pair of those huge, leather chaps of the kind the movies have since immortalized. In fact, I did not look very different from Nap. But unlike him I did not have straight black hair, high cheek bones, and those slanting eyes that bespoke a slight strain of Indian blood.

A gust of wind ripped open a fluffy cloud and through the torn place you could see the bright silk of the blue sky that stretched upward to the zenith. It was spring.

There was spring too in the whinny of the little bronco Napoleon rode. Raising his head toward the horizon, laying back his ears against the bridle adorned with silver dollars, baring his teeth, he uttered his call to the mares. But the mares were far, far away in the north.

On the evening before, just as we were about to cross the Canadian border, Napoleon had pulled in his horse, consulted the direction of the wind with a moistened finger, and laughed.

"Boy! I wouldn't give you thirty bucks for the whole herd!"

"But the duty on them will be ten times that and the Canadian revenue men . . ."

"The devil with the revenue men! The devil with the Canadian cops! Will we put something over on them?"

And I, an unwitting smuggler had agreed, not without a slight twinge of conscience, but nevertheless curious to discover what new trick Nap was up to in his attempts to cheat the Canadian government. Dropping the reins I permitted my horse to browse on the sparse but savory bison grass.

Spitting tobacco juice, Napoleon drew on his gauntlets. Then he slowly untied his lasso and coiled it. He sidled up to the old, testy mare that led the herd. I watched the rope sail through the air. Caught, the mare reared and tugged furiously at the rope. I joined the fray. Accustomed to the sport, his back arched even under his rider's weight, the bronco with a malicious eye followed the captive's struggles. While the bronco pulled sidewise on the rope, Napoleon hastened to take a double hitch around the steel horn of the saddle. Her trembling flanks steaming with sweat, the mare finally settled back on her four feet. With her ears flat back she watched for an opportunity to kick me, but I suc-

ceeded in getting hold of a foreleg and raising it.

Napoleon, the huge rowels of his spurs clinking at every step, opened one of the saddlebags on the pack horse. He drew forth a number of empty tin cans which we had kept for one of those innumerable eventualities of the desert. Then stringing the cans together on a short piece of twine, he fastened them tightly to the mare's tail.

"You can let go of her leg now," he said, as he freed the animal from the noose. "And now, boss, look out for that cayuse of yours and the pack horse. Holy Moses! Look out! I'm going to scare hell out of her."

Leaping into his saddle, Nap lashed at the mare's flanks with the end of his lasso. The mare let fly with her heels, but the bronco under the brutal spikes of the rowel, reared back and avoided the blow. The mare cantered off madly. Behind her galloped Napoleon, the leather tapederos of his stirrups rattling. He fired his revolver into the air.

Kettling, rearing, whinnying, the mare whose hocks were being lashed by the string of cans, cantered toward the herd that leaderless was aimlessly grazing a short distance away. She brought the contagion of panic with her.

Ears back, tails standing straight out behind them,

the young colts trotted along at their mothers' sides. . . . Napoleon shifted his attack.

Galloping low, head between his legs and neck straining forward, the bronco charged the herd. Again Napoleon's revolver rang out. Jostling one another at full gallop in a vast undulation of rumps and heads, the horses followed the mad flight of the mare towards the north. A slight depression in the land engulfed them. . . . In the west the sun touched the farthest limits of the prairie with flame. . . . Napoleon, returning to me, leaped from his saddle, his eyes, his mouth, his shoulders laughing; laughing, too, were his ever-dancing feet.

"When it gets dark, boy! They won't dawdle now! Them horses of yours will lope over the Canadian border at the speed they're going now. There's enough terror in their legs to carry 'em forty-five miles and not a damn Canadian revenue man to stop 'em. They're running straight into the wind—it's from the north—and they won't swerve from that direction by an inch. Don't you worry! We'll find 'em tomorrow about noon near the Sioux camp, where there's plenty of grass and all the water they need! Let's pitch camp!"

Now with night gathering over the boundless plain, we camped beside a little fire. One would have

had to search far to find wood to burn. But for thousands and ten thousands of years, until the year 1885 when the white men stupidly massacred them all off, buffaloes had pastured on the rolling hills of the immense prairie. It is a wonder how old, dry dung, the respectable witness of a departed age, burns without odor. But it gives heat enough to fry ham and boil water for tea.

Our horses were three shadows awkwardly leaping in the moonlight, for we had hobbled their forelegs. Loosely wrapped in our blankets we sprawled leisurely at either side of the fire, our heads pillowed on our saddles. We puffed at our pipes. Napoleon who did not know how to keep still, told his cowboy stories, too beautiful to be true, but ones that Zane Grey would be proud to have written.

Though the prairie is treeless it is not without night-birds. There are hoot owls. . . . And then along the edge of the plain are yelping prairie wolves, cruel, ironic, and garrulous. . . . We were two smugglers! Two smugglers without conscience.

Brief hours of sleep. But who could think of sleeping? A prairie night is too exciting! I dozed until Napoleon nudged me with his elbow and I jumped to my feet. I rolled up my blankets,

saddled my horse, and unhobbled him in the darkness. Taking a chew of tobacco, the half-breed assured me that we still had some little time before daybreak. At an easy gallop we soon crossed the line into Canada on our way to the ranch of David Laprugne, the French-Canadian. We both knew him. Doubtless when we arrived this extraordinary hermit would still be finishing his daily bottle of gin. I already imagined the mingled smells of leather, kerosene, and alcohol that usually pervaded his room. In the darkness we were two shadowy and dreaming riders.

My horse halted suddenly and I regained consciousness. Napoleon had just pulled in his horse. Jabbed by the pommel of my Mexican saddle, I was wide awake immediately. Night had not yet faded. We were riding along the ridge of a hill. Below us a ruddy light pierced the darkness. It was David's ranch.

After we had hitched our horses to the fence, we knocked at the door.

"Come in!" a voice rasped.

We pushed the door open. Lounging in a rocking chair, half asleep before his bottle, David seemed completely indifferent to our entrance. He raised his lean face, barred by a drooping, black mustache.

Then taking up the lamp, he rose from his chair and stepped toward us. He at once recognized who we were, and burst into speech.

"Sapristi! It's Frenchy an' Nap! Ba gosh, I ain' seen you dis sprin', you ol' horse stealers! So you didn't perish in dat beeg col' nort'. An' you have plenty fine horses?"

"They got away from us yesterday evening," Napoleon answered.

"Wit' dat nort' win'? You can tell dat to de revnew man, mon sapree half-breed!" (He winked.) "Mais, I kip close mout'. I don' sell ma frenz. Mais, w'at you do dere, standin' on your hin' feet? You wish to grow roots? Ba gosh! I'll water you den." (He raised the square bottle, held it against the light, and shook his head.) "Nearly empty! Sapree beeznes. An' almos' tree clock! Bateche! I'll go fe'ch 'noder. You dere, Nap! You know w'ere de oats is. Give a peck to each, it won' mak your horses seek. Still own dat piebal' bronco, Nap? I buy heem off you in seconde. Mais, I queet da beeznes."

"Through with business, with trading!" said I, astonished.

David had always impressed me as being a perfect example of the hard-boiled cattle man. Napoleon's spurs jingled on the rough planking of the

floor. He went out. David pried open a case of gin without answering my question. He drew forth a straw-wrapped bottle similar to the one on the table. He carefully rinsed out two glasses. Then, striking the bottom of the bottle with the flat of his hand, he sent the stopper spinning toward the ceiling. He smiled. Napoleon had already returned.

"Yessir, ma fren'. It's a sapree beeznes!" David exclaimed.

He invited us to drink. His voice became tearful when he finally answered the question I had asked five minutes before. I myself had already forgotten it.

"W'y do I queet beeznes? Ah ma fren'! Since how long you are lef' here?"

"It's five weeks ago that I rode into Montana and Wyoming to buy horses."

"Listen den. You haven' sol' dem yet. Mais, you mus' hurry, you mus' make has'e. De wes', it's a sapree beeg place. In de ol' days we use sell dem *en masse*. But it's gone, *complete!*"

"Why?"

"Ask de sapree immigran's. Wi't dere sapree immigration! Now dat all de lan' in de East is use up, de farmers come here. Dey come ev'ry place. De Yankees wit' dere sapree stim engines, an' de Bretons wit dere velvet coats an' dere flat hats wit ribbons,

an' Mennonites, an' a noder kin' Roosian wat call demse'ves Doukhobors, Canadians lak me, Frenshmens lak you, but more stupid, Englishmens from de ol' contree in shor' pan's an wit' gran' airs. Ev'rywan, I tole you, from all de four corners of de worl'. Is dere any sense to it? W'en dey survey here 'bout twen'y yir ago we ol' fellers tank dey not serious. You mus' be plenty crazy to tank of growin' w'eat on dis fine prairie lan'. God mean it for runnin' horses an' cattle on. L'diable les emporte! Seex mon's from now dere won' be a t'ree mile ride wit'out your bes' pony tearin' heemse'f on de barb wire fence. Or wit'out somewan skinnin' your bes' bull under pretex' dat he stray into private prop'ty. De good ol' days is gone. Yas, we are sol'. I still have my two cases gin to drink. After dat, I'll set de ol' house on fire an' move to de citee. I'll fine a wife and live in a 'otel."

"You'll drink yourself to death," said I.

"W'at do I care? I'd radder drank, to drank myse'f dead. Ba gosh! It make ma heart sick! W'en you live fifteen, twen'y year in de prairie lan', raisin' horses, ridin' dem, livin' dis fine life in de wide spaces of op'n air, not botered by de neighbors, 'joyin' liberty to your fill an' den see dem with' dere sapree laws!" (He pointed his thumb over his shoulder toward the East to indicate far away Ot-

tawa.) "Now dey permit all dees peop' to come an' tak de bread from de mout'. You don' see me farmin', eh? Non!"

He drank sadly and we two followed his example. Napoleon, suddenly becoming weary, let his head fall on his broad chest, but I had become wide awake. Our hour's ride had all at once dropped into the past.

David, who had never permitted himself to display any other emotion than mirth or rage, began to weep. Great tears rolling down the wrinkles of his swarthy cheeks, lost themselves in his thick mustache. We let our pipes go out, and the three of us wept together for the prairie, the Grand Prairie. The real Prairie! The Prairie of History and Legend! The Epic Prairie! The Prairie of our youth, the Prairie that had just died!

Dawn found Napoleon and me in our saddles, galloping silently toward Sioux Gulch.

We were then traversing a narrow strip of land. Even at this early hour we saw the smoke of a steam tractor. Long, dismal plough furrows cut the soil behind it, as it pitilessly turned under the bison grass on which our horses, our half-wild steers, and the wild herds of bygone times, had for so long pastured. I recalled the little cabin built of logs and

sod that we had pompously christened "The House of David" and where we had so often emptied bottles of gin with the genial cattle man. In a few days David would set it on fire. It would flame to the skies while he, silent, with tears streaming from his eyes would watch the past years of his life crumble to ashes.

"I think," said Napoleon, replying to my mute soliloquy, "that I'll go down into Oklahoma. You can still live there in peace and besides, I haven't ever been convicted in the states."

It is true that he had been convicted in Canada for a shady horse deal. The charge against him had been a serious one but he had made it even more serious by beating up a Police Sergeant who had come to arrest him. But since that time a few snowstorms had effaced the memory of those evil days and everyone in the Prairie,—the only world that mattered to us—rendered Napoleon the esteem due to an accomplished horseman. And what more than horsemanship has anyone the right to ask of a man of the Prairie?

About noon when we were beginning to wonder where our horses were, we suddenly came across them grazing peacefully in a gully. We could see them clearly enough to count them. Under the influence of certain inexplicable sympathies they had

gathered into small groups and their colors contrasted pleasantly. Naturally bays were in the majority. But there were also chestnuts, dapple-grays, roans, sorrels, light-bays, mouse-grays, and blacks.

First of all we had to catch the mare from whose tail the string of cans still clattered.

His broad-brimmed sombrero jammed tight on his head, his red bandana flapping against his black shirt, with his chaps and his glittering cartridge belt and spurs, with all the primitive beauty of his Mexican saddle, Napoleon trotted forth on his nervous little bronco. First he galloped from one uneasy group of horses to the other until he had isolated the mare. Terrified by the clanking cans she galloped off. Many of the horses turned to watch her, but as the affair did not concern them they returned to their grazing.

Bending forward in his saddle, the half-breed baffled every attempt of the mare to escape. He scarcely held the reins for the bronco knew the game almost as well as his rider. Nap lifted the lasso from the saddle horn, and with his right arm clear of his body, began swinging it around his head. He threw it. The startled mare tried a supreme leap, but could not avoid the noose. She reared. For sport, Napoleon let the rope slip from his hand. Then swift as an arrow, and with acrobatic adroitness he leaned

from his saddle to the ground and caught the rope in his left hand!

We rode along, cursing the plough which now dishonored the Prairie. Gaunt and sun-burned Westerners did not conceal their contempt for us.

"Join the circus and forget about it!" they yelled. "To hell with your horses! Tractors for us. Trucks for us! And if we should need horses give us good, strong percherons and clydes. Your damn little prairie broncos belong to a past age. Let us oil our machines in peace!"

These various insults were scarcely pleasing to the half-breed who, on the war-path, jumped off his horse and stood ready to fight with his interlocutors. But the engineer yanked his whistle and our horses began showing signs of terror. Napoleon had to remount his horse in haste to give chase to our herd. The pioneers in their oil-stained denims raised a satiric cheer. The rounding up of our frightened herd led us far from the Westerners. But Napoleon nevertheless still shouted polyglot curses against them in French, English and Sioux.

As equestrian statues we amazed the Bretons. Newly landed they still wore their strange Morbihan costumes. Dirty and garrulous the women in their black velvet petticoats and their lace head-

dresses screamed their "Jesus ma Doué" at us. The men, holding their oxen by the horns, consulted one another in their strangely unmusical language. Moreover they were people to whom horses were unfamiliar. Our horses in particular frightened them. An old man with gray hair confessed to us that he still put his trust in oxen. His fathers before him had done so, and he intended to do likewise. And he hoped his sons would do the same. Then, with native hospitality, he offered us bread and salt, which we refused. The dirty children, the rancid odor that pervaded their cabins, warned us to be careful.

Our search for markets led us to the Doukhobors, newly arrived from the United States. I explained to Napoleon the restlessness of these people who sought God throughout the world and who, having exhausted Russia and having been discouraged in the States, now searched in Canada for their mythical paradise upon earth. Without hope of selling them any horses, but driven on merely by curiosity, we visited them. Under the stern eyes of the white bearded patriarchs young men with whips forced the women to toil in the fields. Religion forbade these Russians to overtax their beasts, but their mysticism did not deter them from brutality, nor from hurling obscene insults at their wives, their sisters, their daughters and their mothers. They so dis-

gusted us that Napoleon and I agreed that it was regrettable a man's life was held so sacred in Canada. Indeed, the Sioux destroyed by the Anglo-Saxons possessed a higher form of civilization than these fanatics.

We galloped rapidly past the colony of Mennonites. Even to the rugged soul of a cowboy the sight of this profanation was too painful a contrast with what the Prairie had been. Napoleon, moreover, worried me. He had a way of fingering the butt of his revolver that made me fear something violent from him. Though always loquacious, he had suddenly become taciturn. And when he did open his mouth it was only to mutter like a damned soul. The Prairie had become a hell. I longed for the old days of scalping parties, though I had never known them.

More and more did an uneasy sense of the future impose itself upon me. Gone was the happy past! It could be gathered into a little pile of ashes not greater, for example, than David's house would make. I could picture David before his flaming ruins, hurling in, one after the other, all the bright mementoes of his glorious past. He would hurl in empty cases of gin, his high Mexican saddle, rich with its old horsey odors, his bridles, his lasso. But in vain!

For he would be sensible enough, I was certain, not to hurl himself in, too, and as long as man does not destroy himself, he does not destroy Memory. Gone may be the Past! Dead may be the Prairie! But grief endures forever!

Napoleon urged me to come to a decision. I must hasten to turn my horses into money. Was it for nothing that we had ridden on horseback over hundreds of miles, oblivious to fatigue, hunger, thirst, the wind, lightning and storms? Sometimes seated erect, sometimes bent forward in our saddles; happy today, depressed tomorrow. But one must sell, sell, sell! Napoleon with the wages I owed him, planned to go over into the territory of Oklahoma in the hope of rediscovering the old time cowboy.

We stopped at Moose Jaw. A man from Winnipeg, a derby jammed down over his ears, a cigar perching in the corner of his mouth, dressed in blue serge trousers and newly polished shoes, offered me an acceptable price for part of my horses. The bank honored the check which he with an imperial flourish of his fountain pen had signed on the mahogany bar. Whiskey and soda gleamed in tall glasses before us.

Without removing his cigar from between his gold teeth, Joseph Gould vouchsafed me some excel-

lent advice. To the Northwest in the Province of Saskatchewan beyond Plume Lake, I would find a colony of high-class immigrants. Farmers from Ontario of English, Irish and Scotch stock were opening up a new section there. The soil, moreover, was not heavy and for that reason our light horses had an excellent chance of being accepted by the settlers.

In a torrent of words the citizen from Winnipeg supplied me with innumerable sales arguments. Lighting a fifth cigar and ordering a fourth whiskey he declared that the upkeep of the horses I had for sale would be considerably less than the upkeep of the heavy clydes of Ontario. My horses would be much less subject to chapping (the plague of the west) than were the hairy pasterns of the larger horses. Finally he advised me to explain to these Easterners that veterinaries were very scarce in their part of the world and that it would be wiser for them to use horses acclimated to intemperate weather. At each new argument my friend became thirsty and his color rose in the most disconcerting manner. I breathed a sigh of relief when he completed his lecture without suffering a stroke of apoplexy.

Napoleon and I had many a hard day guiding our herd through alleys of barbed wire, but what was

even worse, guiding them past fields of wheat which the farmers had not taken the trouble to fence off. We realized that we were passing through the best wheat land of Canada, a hardy wheat growing on rich, purple soil. The damage our horses might have made would have cost us a great deal. Nestling in these vast stretches of cultivated land were bungalows and cottages painted gay colors and surrounded by well cared for gardens.

The sympathetic curiosity of many of the farmers procured us their boundless hospitality, a hospitality that expressed itself in bacon, eggs, fresh vegetables, puddings, cream cheeses and pies. The farmers' wives, their clean, bare arms akimbo, would invite us into their homes, offering us an abundance of water and soap in ornate wash basins. Their hospitality helped disperse the memory of the Bretons, Doukhobors, and Mennonites.

Once again we left the wheat lands. Our trail led us through a wild country, low, flat, and frequently wooded. The prairies themselves were covered with dwarf willows. Lakes, whose glass-smooth surfaces were broken only by the tracks of parading ducks, mirrored the passing clouds. Our horses were less terrified by wild hares than they had been terrified by grouse in the Great Prairie to the south.

We roasted game over a bed of coals. The mosquitoes were innumerable and tireless. The smoke from our smudge, skimming along the ground, invited our horses to group themselves under its protective screen. Indeed, our herd had become completely adapted to this nomadic life. They had evolved a certain discipline which often saved us the trouble of leaping into our saddles to corral some refractory horse. During the day we moved on slowly that the horses might build up their strength by pasturing on the succulent vetch and the red grass that was a little like the short bison grass of the Prairie.

We listened to the music of twilight. First of all, before the sun had set behind the stunted trees to the west, the owls announced from branch to branch the last agony of day. Then a wolf barked. Suddenly our mares would whinny their call to the colts. For the wolf is king of these Canadian nights and only the well aimed hoof of an angry mare will make him respect the life of a colt. When the wolf barked a second time the herd had already gathered to protect the foals. Nevertheless, the horses still continued to graze, quietly and without haste, nibbling at the low shrubs and gently trampling the grass. Then would come the cry of the whippoorwill and the grave note of the night owl and the eagle owl. Above the

fringe of trees we heard the slow flight of nocturnal giants and their furtive shadows crossed between us and the moon. . . . The cry of a strangled hare. . . . Mysterious crashings through the forest. Sighs even more mysterious, for one could not tell if they were those of pleasure or of pain. Love and Death inscribed about us the interwoven mystery of their circles. As we took turns watching over our herd we would listen to Nature's alluring and cruel music. And at daybreak after a hurried breakfast, we would climb into our saddles to follow our tireless trail through an emerald and azure universe, studded here and there with a wealth of purple eglantines and scarlet lilies.

The days lengthened. They seemed to crack from being stretched so long, but night would soon repair them. We pushed our way along sand bluffs on whose summits a few dwarf cactuses and the mournful creeping cyrus stoically defied drouth. The hoofs of our horses raised a hard and cruel dust. Mixed with sweat it clung to our bodies like armor. At night the mosquitoes tormented us when we washed.

Now, having left the cliffs behind us, we saw the first signs of smoke rising above a screen of poplars. It was, I well remember, an evening as delicate as an opal. Napoleon's bronco whinnied for he already

scented unknown mares. They answered his call. Dogs at the same moment began to bark.

We proceeded until we came to some freshly ploughed land. A red and white house rose before us. Barns, stables, grain sheds loomed in the gathering twilight. Inquisitive figures appeared in the doorway of the house.

Spurring my horse into a gallop, I carefully skirted a field of grain, blue in the twilight. When I reached the door I drew up my horse, much to the surprise of the group gathered there. This group included a tall man with a beard, two sandy-haired youngsters, a red-headed fellow with blue eyes, and two girls in neat aprons who seemed as delighted as the others were astonished. Their exclamations brought a bony old woman to the door who mutely questioned husband, sons, hired man, and daughters without eliciting a reply.

"Is it a circus?" one of the girls asked.

Three hundred miles away the American mechanics had asked the same question, and its repetition here explained where I was. For farther south and west the appearance of our herd had surprised no one. I was therefore certainly in one of those new farming sections that Joseph Gould had told me of in Moose Jaw.

I briefly announced my name and my profession. The bearded colossus heard me with a suspicious grin. My cartridge belt, my pistols and my rifle had inspired him with evident distrust. He began by announcing that he had no need of horses. To my request that he let us pass the night at his place with our horses corralled near his stable, he glanced toward his wife, who scowled a refusal. The refusal was evidently neither to the taste of the fellow with red hair nor to the girls.

The girls, both speaking at once, teased their father with:

"Let them come in. . . . They're strangers who've come a long way. . . . You mustn't refuse them shelter. . . . You can't refuse to keep them out at this hour." Meanwhile the red-headed fellow questioned me as to the number of horses I had and what kind they were. Then turning to the bearded giant he said, "Say, Governor! why not be the first around here to make a choice? These two men can find a place to bunk at MacPherson's, Jones's, or over at the Frenchman's. And if there is a good horse in the lot, the others would cotton onto it."

The boss stroked his beard and glanced inquiringly at his wife, his sons, and his daughters. These last two remained silent. The old woman re-entered the house, grumbling.

"No, no, Archer. I can't stand seeing the old woman lose her temper again this evening."

"Don't pay any attention to her, governor. I'd be darned if I'd let my wife henpeck me."

"Well, perhaps you're right," said the boss. Then turning to his two sons he said, as if excusing himself, "Archer and the girls want me to."

The young men nodded their heads in silence.

Archer offered his help, but I refused it. Without waiting for a reply I spurred my horse forward, the colossus shouting after me:

"Look out for the wheat! Look out for the wheat!"

Without great difficulty Napoleon and I succeeded in rounding up our horses and driving them into the corral. Then after we had hung our saddles and guns on the fence, we entered the house, followed by Archer.

The two girls brought us soap and wash basins.

CHAPTER TWO

Birth of Love

I OFTEN think that this meal determined the future course of my life. It seems true that everything led me to that house. First of all our despair since the night we had mourned the death of the Prairie over a bottle of David's gin. Then the advice the apoplectic Joseph Gould had offered me over a bar at Moose Jaw. Later there was to be the trip into the North. . . . For would I have been Paul Durand's last comrade and the executor of his will, had I not found a certain mischievous pleasure in staring at Hannah O'Molloy, the blonde?

Yes, let me think of her as that, the blonde.

Let me not forget her hair with that tinge of tawny gold a red-headed ancestor had bequeathed her. Let me remember her long and slender body, the gleaming skin of her neck and arms, a virginal white no kiss of the sun had succeeded in ravishing. Let me remember her laughing, yes, laughing with all her white teeth. Let me remember her long hands whose delicacy neither the milking of cows, nor the

scrubbing of floors had been able to destroy. But above all let me remember the splendor of her womanhood to a man of the Prairie whose blood was afire.

All during supper my heart throbbed and my face burned feverishly. However, I had to listen to Archer's stories of the Boer War which he had fought in, said he, "on the right side; that is, of course, against England."

He praised me for being the compatriot of Villebois-Mareuil. He recalled the defense of the *kopjes*.

"We were in a deep trench," said he, "and we could hardly keep from laughing when the English fire did us no harm. The shells passed howling over our heads. I wish you could have seen the plumes of smoke they made when they exploded. And when the English stood up to charge us, thinking we were all dead, we let them have it."

He then undertook to slander the cavalry volunteers raised by Lord Strathcona.

"The devil with them!" he exclaimed. "They weren't worth much more than the English. Two of them on patrol fell into our hands and were led to see Dewet. I was present. He questioned them, but as we had no extra food to feed prisoners we sent them back to French. They got themselves captured the next day and the day after that. Then

old Dewet had to loosen his belt he laughed so hard and he dictated a letter to French asking him to be kind enough to change his patrol once in a while so that we wouldn't have to see the same old faces every day. I suggested a postscript: 'So when the war is ended we will have a speaking acquaintance with every soldier in the British army.' "

While he told the story he continually winked at the girls, thereby informing them that his jokes were being made at the expense of all cowboys in general, Lord Strathcona having recruited his cavalry from among them. Impassive, courteous, slightly disdainful, the half-breed gave every appearance of not understanding. With his delicate Indian profile, and his bright expressive eyes, he seemed interested only in the jam and pies that Mrs. O'Molloy, who, having finally thawed out, laid before him in generous abundance. A few gulps of tea and the smoke of our pipes helped us to forget Archer's jokes.

O'Molloy, stroking his sandy beard, his sad, blue eyes twinkling, told us stories of the days he had worked in Vermont. He recalled the free-for-alls between Irishmen and French Canadians on pay days when the bars had closed for the night. He described fist fights dimly lighted by a lantern which a spectator held. If the police appeared a boy was posted to give the signal. Then conquerors and

conquered would disperse, dragging off their wounded and their drunks.

Hannah and her sister tried to get us to talk of the Prairie. I felt little desire to be loquacious. Though I knew that stories of equestrian prowess would interest the girls, I preferred to let Napoleon tell them. Saddened by the memory of the dead Prairie, the half-breed recalled the great round-ups in spring and fall, when the ranchers corralled their wandering horses and cattle to count them and to select the animals they planned to sell. Cattle-raisers and cowboys rivalled each other in skill. The prize went to the man who exhibited the best trained horse. Then there were great lasso throwing contests. Napoleon boasted of being able to lasso a galloping horse by any leg he wished to.

Archer, sarcastic and rude, doubted his skill. Veins of anger swelled in Napoleon's neck. A scowl passed over his forehead. Foreseeing a fight I hastily intervened. I promised that on the morrow we would give an exhibition of the art of the Prairie by breaking two horses. Then noticing a violin hanging by some green ribbons from a nail, I asked the half-breed to display his talents as a virtuoso.

O'Molloy's son Tim, without a word at once took down the instrument. Napoleon tuned it. Then holding it against his chest instead of beneath his chin,

he began playing a lively jig. Hannah and Archer rose and stood facing each other. George, the younger of the two sons, faced Maggie. Then the rhythm of the Celtic dance, cousin to the Highland fling, to the boree of Auvergne and to the rounds of Brittany, shook the house. O'Molloy, Tim, and I accompanied the tune by clapping our hands. Mrs. O'Molloy stopped knitting and from her rocking chair admired with open mouth the agility of her daughters.

We had won her over completely by refusing to trouble her for so unimportant a thing as a bed. Accustomed to sleeping under the stars we preferred to roll up in our blankets outdoors. As a matter of fact it was the wisest thing for me to do. For if you are a young man you will understand the torment of sleeping under the same roof with a young lady into whose eyes you have looked all too deeply.

We were up at dawn. Though it was still early, the morning dew had already evaporated into a pearl-colored mist. It discreetly veiled the awakening of the neighboring woods.

The house woke into life. Archer, his face covered with lather, a razor in one hand and a mirror in the other, appeared at the door. He saluted us with a happy wave of his hand. Then hanging his

mirror on a nail, he proceeded to shave himself carefully.

Fresh and smiling, their hair done up in a neat knot on the top of their heads, Hannah and Maggie invited us to come and wash up. Then they hurried to the barn to milk the cows. Hastily washing and shaving Napoleon and I hurried after them to offer our services. The girls handed us their brimming pails and confided us the job of running the milk through the separator. Rasping but cordial, the voice of Mrs. O'Molloy called us to a large breakfast of oatmeal, bacon and eggs, potatoes, and jam.

We had decided to pasture our horses in a low-lying plain we had observed the evening before. As it was covered by a growth of dwarf willow, O'Molloy was not planning to mow it. From this pasture we could see the Irishmen at work. Tim and George cleared the ground of brush while O'Molloy and Archer, thundering out curses, each ploughed with a team of four horses. We could also see the house. The girls appeared in the back yard and scattered grain for the noisy hens. As the two sisters were dressed exactly alike we could not distinguish between them so far away. I tried to guess which was Hannah.

About ten o'clock I saw them leave the house together. Each one carried a stone pitcher. It contained

cold water flavored with tea. One of the girls went off toward the field where the O'Molloys were working, while the other girl made her way towards us. I feared it was Maggie instead of Hannah. My fears were justified, and my morning was spoiled. However, I started a flirtation with the girl which did not seem to displease her. I thought by doing so I would punish Hannah for not coming instead of her sister. But when Maggie left I became sullen and angry.

At lunch Archer reminded us of our promise to astound the household with our feats of horsemanship. We had promised to break two untamed roans, one five years old, the other four, both of whom had not even known that least bond of servitude, the halter. Hannah jestingly accused us of bluffing.

"You'll only do circus tricks," she said. "Cowboys disappeared long ago. The horses that you'll pretend to break will probably be tame already."

Smiling, I offered to prove to her personally that these horses were really wild. If she succeeded in taming one of them I promised to give it to her. If, however, she should lose, I would demand a kiss. Would she accept the bargain? She laughingly assured me that she would take a chance. I felt the

half-breed's knee press against mine. Archer was staring at me suspiciously.

It was neither the place nor the time to engage in a battle for her eyes, however beautiful they were. I assured the girl that I was too much of a gentleman to insist on the payment of a bet when I was so certain of winning it. However, I would not recant on my half of the contract. If she succeeded in saddling one of the horses it would be hers. Archer answered for her.

Authoritatively he explained to the girl that my horses were really not tame. It would certainly be dangerous to go near them, particularly for anyone who did not know how to handle horses. Archer announced that he would see to it that Hannah did nothing so foolish. The girl against her will resigned herself to Archer's command and lapsed into silence. But when she passed behind him on the way to the kitchen, she took advantage of a general inattention to make a face at him. I, alone, saw her and she raised a finger to her lips. This complicity delighted me.

To the amazement of the family we succeeded in breaking the two roans. In former years this sport had been my favorite pastime, and as I saddled my pony I mournfully remembered those old days. But

the Prairie had died and I would never enjoy the sport again. After breaking a few horses in my herd, so that they would all be in proper condition to be sold, I would say good-bye forever to the fascinating life of the cowboy. Pitying myself, I at the same time pitied all the horses I had torn from the wild, free life of the Prairie. By what right had I captured and sold them into slavery?

However, as soon as I was in the saddle, I shook these thoughts from my mind. Napoleon had already lassoed one of the animals and had lashed the end of the rope to his saddle. I missed my horse twice to Archer's evident satisfaction and to my own mortification.

"What leg are you trying to lasso him by?" Archer asked, sarcastically.

A sudden turn of the horse afforded me an opportunity to make a difficult throw and the cries of the girls applauded my success. Even though there was no necessity for the trick, for the horse had halted at the first sensation of strangling, I dropped the rope. Then shouting, I frightened my quarry into a gallop. I flew after him in pursuit, and picked the rope from the ground with as much deftness as Napoleon could have done it. If Archer's red hair had turned green there wouldn't have been more astonishment in the group.

It is a difficult enough operation to make a halter of a lasso which is holding an untamed four-year-old. However, both Napoleon and I succeeded in doing it. After that, the major part of the work passed to our ponies. With the rope lashed in a half hitch around the pommel of the saddle, we dismounted and took our ponies by the bridle. One should have seen these two intelligent beasts tug at the rope. Behind them, resisting furiously, were the two unbroken horses. The one I was taming raised his nostrils in the air, for the chafing rope and noose caused him evident pain. At first he displayed his resentment by striving unsuccessfully to rear. Hardly had his two legs left the ground than my pony would tug more fiercely at the rope. Unbalanced, the roan would fall back awkwardly on his four hoofs and let himself be dragged forward a few steps.

The rapidity with which the two roans began to respond to the rope amazed the farmers.

"They know their business, those fellers," muttered O'Molloy, stroking his beard.

"You could fill a large book with what we know," Napoleon replied, merrily. Then turning to Hannah, he said, "Do you still want to ride one of these broncos?"

No one could smile more pleasantly. (At least I

believed so then.) She shook her head, her teeth gleaming. Then glancing toward me she said:

"Maybe Archer, who knows everything, would like to try."

Goaded to action by the challenge, Archer, who was strangely pale, accepted. Napoleon dryly asked him which of the two animals he chose. He pointed to my pupil and we at once set to work saddling the beast.

It was not easy. I held the roan up short, with one hand on the bridle and the other grasping his nostrils. He puffed and snorted. Napoleon slipped a rope around one foreleg, raised it, and held it tight by lashing the line around him like a girth. Distending his sweaty and dust begrimed belly, the animal struggled against the tightening of the double girth. Inch by inch Napoleon won over the horse. Finally we were able to invite the Irishman to get into the saddle. He declined an offer of my Mexican spurs, and I knew then that his doom was sealed. Ten seconds later we were helping him to his feet, while the roan, its stirrups flying in the air, kicked up its heels and joyfully bounding across the field tried to send the saddle after the rider. Archer sustained no other injury than a large rent in his black shirt and a serious wound to his vanity. Although his

overthrow had rendered my job more difficult, I easily captured the roan and quieted him.

Archer immediately pretended that he must return to work.

"Go along, if you want," said O'Molloy. "As for me I certainly have earned a half-day's rest."

I saw Maggie, giggling, pinch Hannah's arm. The latter was staring at me and biting her lips. She interested me all the more. Would she be the prize in a fight between the Irishman and me? The desire of winning her increased my joy in harnessing my pupil to a heavy farm wagon, side by side with an old horse lent me by O'Molloy. Vanquished by the preceding brutalities, henceforth convinced of man's power, the roan displayed only an ill-disguised astonishment. He wisely imitated the actions of his docile teammate. Under the whip he consented to haul the wagon.

O'Molloy immediately asked me what I wanted for the two horses. I fixed the price at three hundred dollars, offering to knock off fifty of that if he would rent me one of his fenced in pastures until I had sold the rest of my herd. Moreover I gave him very easy terms. He needed to pay me only one half of the price, the rest to be in the form of short term notes.

Mrs. O'Molloy intervened. Working her long thin nose, she tried to beat me down twenty-five dol-

lars. Hannah willfully joined in the argument. I would have gladly ceded to the mother as reward for her hospitality, but the girl's part in the business irritated me. I found myself both desiring and hating her. I remarked dryly that I had not stolen my horses and that I did not intend to lose money on them.

"Moreover," I added, "I am not in need. If Mrs. O'Molloy will tell me how much I owe her, I will go to find buyers elsewhere, for time is money."

My argument succeeded. Waving her hand toward the northwest, Mrs. O'Molloy exclaimed:

"Offer to pay Mrs. MacPherson for the two or three poor meals she will serve you. She may need the money, God Bless her! to buy a decent dress for herself. Thank God my old man isn't a drunk like that Scotchman! At least we have a sack of flour in the house to make bread. Ah, it's a fine time you'd be having to get money out of that Scotchman MacPherson! Thank God! we've always settled our debts with good, hard earned money. And I would like to meet the man who could as much as say the O'Molloys had cheated him out of a dollar, that I would! A dollar! Did I say a dollar? Well, I meant a cent!"

"It's true, papa," said Hannah blushing charmingly, "that the two roans are beautiful. Hitched

to the two seated wagon they will look wonderful when we drive to mass on Sunday. And you can turn poor Joe and Casey out into the pasture, the poor old beasts have to work so hard all week long!"

"Ah! if Archer was only here," sighed O'Molloy, incapable of reaching a decision alone. "But the son of a gun is trying to work off his bad temper by ploughing."

"To the devil with Archer!" exclaimed Tim. "Can't we do anything without asking his opinion? 'Archer! What will we do now? What will we do here?' And it all ends by no one knowing who's the boss around here."

"Archer knows a great deal," pleaded the bearded giant, sadly stroking his gold and silver beard. "But if you all agree, Archer certainly can't say anything about it."

And Archer said never a word! After he had unharnessed the horses his sole occupation was separating Hannah from me. He was somewhat aided in his efforts by the arrival of a dark-complexioned and delicate looking lad who spoke very bad English. He at once fastened on Maggie. She led him up to me. He was French and his name was Paul Durand. He boasted to me of the mild climate of

his native home of Tourraine. In French, so that Maggie would be unable to understand him, he confessed that a hopeless love affair had led him to choose between suicide and exile.

"I can well understand why you chose exile," said I. "For it seems that Canada has offered you some consolation."

I pointed to Maggie, who smiled, though she did not understand a word. The young man blushed.

"If you only knew how nice she is," he murmured. "There is no one like her."

And taking her into his arms he kissed her.

Nevertheless, I considered the gold of Hannah's hair richer and her skin a purer white. I had to admit that Archer had good taste.

I hated him more for it. Putting O'Molloys' recent acquisitions into the stable, fortunately, distracted me from my thoughts. Napoleon led the horses across the field and to Archer's amazement they followed like lambs. Mrs. O'Molloy believed that we had put a charm over them, for her Celtic soul was still steeped in unconscious paganism. I admired her for believing in these old charms and superstitions and I did not take the trouble to disabuse her mind.

As the horses were about to enter the stable they showed signs of terror and I rushed to help Napo-

leon lead them in. Nap took charge of the more unruly of the two animals. The stable seemed to impress the horse as being a kind of huge trap. He balked and in spite of the rope that cut into his raw flesh, he suddenly reared. Napoleon, however, kept his feet. I reached for my pistol, ready to shoot the beast if he proved too vicious. I had once nearly lost my life under similar circumstances. Trampled under the hoofs of an enraged bronco I would have been killed had a quick-witted cowboy not sent a bullet through the horse's head. But Nap stood his ground. He grasped the horse by the nostrils and subdued him that way. Then he raised his hand to the horse's eyes and patted him. The horse calmed down. Ten seconds later he was hitched before a manger, contemplating with curiosity, but without appetite, a pile of oats before him. We led the other roan to the stall without difficulty.

In contrast to the huge clydes the farmer owned, these two horses seemed extremely light. But I pointed out the beauty of their sloping flanks and the smoothness of their flawless legs. I assured him (and I knew it was true) that as the soil he ploughed was very light my horses would give him more satisfaction than his heavier ones and that, moreover, their upkeep would be much less. This anyone would have known who had been raised in the

west, but it was news to a man who had learned farming in Ontario where the soil is very heavy. Thoughtfully stroking his beard, O'Molloy listened to my lecture in silence.

We left the horses and stepped out of the stable. Like figures in an old print the two couples were seated on a fence and at a slight distance from each other. The setting sun gleamed behind them, transforming the hair of the girls into gold and Archer's hair into flame.

Stylishly dressed in his black sateen shirt and his blue jumpers, Archer was employing all his native gifts of eloquence to make Hannah forget my presence. At least so I believed when I heard her high laughter, a bit vulgar, thought I severely. But the vulgarity was charming. As she laughed she tipped back her head and I could see the gleaming white of her neck and all the mystery of her firm breasts, beneath her calico dress.

With clenched teeth I resolved to begin selling my horses on the very next day. This task, by enslaving me to something other than Hannah's eyes, would free my heart from the love and hate which already terrified me.

MacPherson, Grant, Campbell all opposed my arguments with their native Scotch prudence.

Angus MacPherson leaned across the table and stared at me with his whiskey-reddened eyes.

Grant, a hilarious Silenus, always had a joke on the tip of his tongue which prevented us from coming down to business.

And Jimmy Campbell, chewing his heavy, black beard kept repeating, "Yes. Yes. But you've got to prove it."

Angus MacPherson informed me that before buying he would have to see a pair of my horses hitched up to his plough and put to work. Realizing that this was a miserly trick to get a few acres of land ploughed free of charge, I refused.

I then attacked the enormous Grant who impressed me as being more open to a trade. He suffered from the malady of biblical quotations and his lectures were interminable, so frequently did he base his arguments on the wisdom of Holy Scripture. He knew Solomon's Proverbs by heart. As a lay pastor in a dirty shirt and broken suspenders tied together with pieces of string, he would rumble in his deep bass: "For as it is written in the Proverbs; 'My mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips'." Or thrusting his pitchfork into a pile of hay he would ask, "Brother, can you interpret that text?" I would have to confess my total ignorance of such matters. Satisfied in having

achieved a spiritual victory over me, he would listen more amiably to my arguments.

But O'Molloy himself clinched them. One day as we were leaning against Grant's barn door, we saw the two roans hitched to a load of hay pass by. Usually recognizing all the horses of the neighborhood by their color or gait, Grant was surprised not to know this team. I told him the story of the two horses I had recently broken to harness and sold to O'Molloy. Notwithstanding the application which he gave to the verse, "Receive my instruction and not silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold," which I first took to express doubt, he finally admitted that these little horses, considering the condition of the roads, would do work equal to that which he got out of his huge clydes. Moreover my horses weighed from eight hundred and fifty to nine hundred pounds each, while the big horses from Ontario tipped the scales at thirteen hundred. That necessarily meant a sensible increase in upkeep. Four pecks of oats a day were enough for my horses, but his required at least six.

These arguments impressed him. He concealed his defeat under the remark, "Give an obstinate man a wide road." I was this obstinate man whom he invited to his table, a table far more frugal than that of Mrs. O'Molloy, to talk over the sale of the horses.

I flattered myself that I had been more obstinate than the Scotchman. Secretly I had allotted each of the farmers in the district one, two, or three horses according to the area of their cultivated land. I had already imposed my will upon one of the three countrymen, in spite of the fact that they had strikingly illustrated that old proverb of their race, "Scots stand shoulder to shoulder." The Prairie had conquered in death; once again the cowboy had whipped the farmer.

The acid ugliness of Mrs. Grant exhaled divers arguments against the O'Molloys. What an idea it was of mine, she proclaimed, to accept hospitality from them! Wasn't a Scotchman's generosity proverbial? And how did I dare subject myself to the danger of Catholic infection. Thank God, her family had always been strict Protestants. And perhaps even if I were a Catholic myself, contact with a Protestant household like hers might open my eyes to divine truth.

Her mouth widening into a broad grin, Mrs. Grant blamed Mrs. O'Molloy for letting that daughter Hannah of hers fall in love with Archer Joyce. No one knows where he came from and he was rascal enough to fight England during the Boer war. It was a pity he hadn't been captured and shot. He certainly is too much like those *Fenians* of 1870 who

preached rebellion against England and carried their raids even into the loyal province of Ontario.

MacPherson, too, made even harder remarks about the Irishman. Offering me a glass of whiskey, the lanky farmer asked me to drink it to the memory of William of Orange "who delivered Great Britain from Pretenders and Papists." I confessed to the Scotchman that I myself was a papist. He smilingly excused himself.

"I only mean that damn Irishman. If a crime is ever committed in this section, we won't go to the trouble of looking for the criminal, we'll just hang him."

The universal disfavor under which Archer labored, attracted me to his defense. After all, I well knew what sort of a person he was. He was one of those undisciplined Celts, rebellious, boastful and pugnacious, who have existed in every generation. He was a member of a race that had badgered the English from the very beginning of England's history. Indeed, he was closely related to those Gallic firebrands, those garrulous anarchists, who are forever quarrelling among themselves, with their neighbors, and who are always ready to foment strife and trouble.

The hot-heads of his race have always set the British Empire on fire. True to type, Archer brought

trouble into the settlement, created it among his neighbors, stirred up mischief among the O'Molloys and probably made Hannah's life miserable. But enough! After all, what did it matter to me? What was most important was that Hannah should cause me no unhappiness. But that would be easy to avoid. I needed only to accord this little Irish girl no more importance than she deserved. I should regard her as only a minor character in the magnificent picture that lay before me. For to consider it honestly, life here—even though it were entirely different from the fiery life of the Prairie—was a magnificent panorama, a thrilling fresco of human energy. The marsh, the woods, and even the climate, were a part of it. And these humble farmers, the O'Molloys, Grants, MacPhersons, Campbells, Jones, Atkins, Lavellées, the Irish, Scotch, English, French Canadians, all the real workers of the Empire, toiled here for the prosperity and to the development of a gigantic enterprise flourishing under the colors of the Union Jack.

A splendid spectacle, worthy of occupying many years of my life.

That is why I accepted the suggestion of Paul Durand who informed me there was a concession of land next to his own that was still open. I therefore went to the land office and fulfilled the conditions required by law.

Thus did the Prairie die in me forever.

CHAPTER THREE

The Reveille of Autumn

THE Prairie had died within me but the Forest had been born. The concession I had selected was on the outskirts of an immense virgin forest. It was a swampy land, bordered by a thick growth of tall willows. Should one attempt a passage through these woods he would be impeded by the entangled branches of dead and living trees, for Death and Life are inseparable in Nature.

Napoleon and I, however, made our way through the heavy undergrowth. Though his Indian blood made him confident in the open Prairie, he became distrustful in the forest, and therefore did not experience the pleasure I felt. Places where he could not ride a horse were for him no better than a prison. To gallop was freedom, to walk, slavery. But I believed, on the contrary, that there was freedom in the darkness of a forest.

Paul Durand assumed the task of hauling the planks, shingles, doors, windows, two barrels of nails and various small pieces of household goods

from the distant village where I had bought them. Murchison the storekeeper was a shrewd salesman and an indefatigable talker. A bloated giant, though full of energy, his heavy step made his store tremble. His store had recently been painted red and bore a huge sign printed in white letters, A. W. Murchison, General Merchandize. He had all the inquisitiveness of a prosecuting attorney. I am certain that when a client had left his store he jotted down various observations he had made on the man's character. Desiring to mystify him I invented a long and fantastic story about myself. He never heard the end of the tale for in the middle of it Durand rushed in to tell me that Napoleon was wild drunk and primed for trouble.

I hurried to the hotel. Napoleon, fighting mad, was in the barroom shouting that he would turn Archer's face into mince meat. Archer was hardly less drunk himself. The barkeeper was restraining him with great difficulty in one corner of the room. A traveling salesman, taking me aside, murmured with a scandalized air that the sight was "an eloquent plea in favor of the dry regime." Jumping up and down in the center of the room, swinging his fists wildly and clanking his spurs, Napoleon was enough to scare anyone out of his wits. I, however,

grabbed him by the collar and told him to get his hat and leave.

"Not before I've skinned that coyote alive!" he yelled.

I did not hear the insults Archer hurled at him for the barkeeper caught the Irishman square in the mouth with a huge, hairy fist.

"Do you think the drunk is armed?" asked the drummer, timorously.

I shrugged my shoulders without replying. I wished to save my voice for the half-breed. He, by the way, had certainly let loose. All the money which I had advanced him at his request had gone up in drink. I could easily see what had happened. He had invited everyone to drink with him, as was all too evident from the spectacle of Tim curled up in a corner and O'Molloy and MacPherson weeping into each other's whiskey. Finally, as absolute proof, the cash register recorded the sum of twenty-five dollars. Every cent that Napoleon had handed to the barkeep had gone for liquor. I observed as much to that sweating and angry gentleman.

"Sure, that's the way it went," he growled. "So far as money goes the half-breed paid like a gentleman, but for holding his likker, he ain't no better'n a leaky pail."

I conceived the idea of telling Napoleon that a

stranger had just taken it into his head to ride the piebald bronco Nap had left hitched to the fence in front of the hotel. All thoughts of the red-headed Irishman left his mind immediately. Rushing out of the bar he flung his arms around his horse's neck and kissed him tenderly. I handed Paul Durand my list, asked him to make the rest of the purchases, and jumping onto my horse, I led the rapidly sobering Napoleon away on his.

A path we had cut permitted us to enter the forest. As the undergrowth was dense we were obliged to make a clearing around any tree we wished to chop down. After cutting away a space large enough to swing an axe in, we felled the tree. To the astonishment of Paul Durand and Archer, whom curiosity had reconciled to us, we easily dragged out the logs by hitching a rope to the saddle horn. The farmer's ignorance of everything concerning horses amused Napoleon's cowboy soul.

When Nap and I began to build the cabin, Archer offered to help us. He boasted of being a past master in the art of dovetailing corner logs. And in fact, we had to admit that he handled an axe extremely well.

Mutual aid, as well as curiosity, brought us reinforcements. A heavy rain having made it impos-

sible to put their hay in the barn, O'Molloy's two sons, accompanied by Grant and MacPherson arrived to visit us one afternoon. I at once dispatched Paul Durand to town to bring us a couple of bottles of whiskey, a keg of beer, some ham and some canned fruit.

Napoleon avoided the cabin he had helped me build as if it were some sort of trap. His Indian blood made him long for the open spaces. With money in his pocket he wished to go somewhere to the south, he did not know exactly where. Perhaps into the southwest of Alberta or into Wyoming or, if that were necessary, even into rocky Oklahoma. He would there find some cattleman or dealer who would hire him for his skill and his horsemanship.

I accompanied him at a rapid trot. Under his lasso, a frying pan, tied carefully to his saddle, clattered joyfully. I carried the provisions rolled up in a blanket behind the cantle. More than twenty-five miles southwest of O'Molloy's in the shade of a blasted aspen, we took our last meal together. Silence as heavy as a rain-soaked blanket hung over our shivering shoulders. We smoked our last pipe in silence.

My horse, still saddled, browsed fraternally with the piebald bronco. But when the latter playfully

snatched at a clump of grass, my pony whinnied and attempted to bite him. Seizing hold of my horse's bridle I jerked his head to one side. Accustomed to gentler treatment, he stared at me in blank astonishment.

Napoleon gripped my hand and without a word of farewell leaped into his saddle. Doubtless to conceal his emotions he drove his spurs deep into his horse's flanks. The beast bounded forward.

I heard the horse's galloping hoofs grow dimmer as the dear back in black sateen with the red V of the bandana against it, dwindled slowly out of sight.

I was alone. Seated in a leather armchair which had been sent me from Winnipeg along with a box of books, I meditated upon my future. Was I a born farmer? No. I was a nomad who broke horses when I was hired to do so. I would clear only enough land to keep me on good terms with the Canadian government. Wheat could grow as God willed. It was all the same to me. I owned six breeding mares. I would buy a few cows and one of those Hereford bulls with a white head, white hoofs and straight horns. Thanks be to God! If the Prairie were dead, the North was still alive. And in the approaching winter I would go north to buy furs. I would go

North as I had done in all the winters of the past and as I would in all the winters of the future, until that time when I no longer returned (a little useless something under a grave of snow). Yes. I had earned money by fur-trading, and I would earn more. But while the concession of land was mine, I would take my rest upon it.

The house had only two rooms. A kitchen which was also dining-room and storehouse, and a bedroom where I could at least read my books. Along with the *Discourse on Method* which I have always loved for its simplicity, I had a selection of English writers: Spenser's *Fairie Queen,* Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus,* Shakespeare's complete works, the *Hellenics* of Landor, the *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley, and Milton's Sonnets. I also had *The Unfortunate Traveller* by Nashe, *Pickwick,* Kipling's *Jungle Tales* and everything I could buy in Winnipeg by Hazlitt. I always carried in my pocket a copy of the Twelve Cæsars by Suetonius. Tell me if these books are not enough to keep a man busy for a few hours each day for the rest of his life? Paul Durand asked me if I were crazy or if I intended giving lectures on literature. He had a small library of which he was very proud, but it represented the taste of a bourgeois Frenchman.

Often when he became tired of reading he would take me with him to visit the O'Molloys. Archer, whose Hannah I no longer monopolized, greeted me most cordially. The fellow still remained an enigma to me. Though he appeared completely uneducated, certain remarks he made about my library proved that this was not the case.

"Why the devil," he said to me one day, "haven't you got Swift, Sterne, Fielding and Goldsmith in your library?"

That my library did not include these authors was due neither to my ignorance nor to contempt. I could not find them in the bookstores of Winnipeg and I did not buy more books on each of my trips than a man could carry away with him under his arm. This reply seemed to satisfy Archer.

Yes, what sort of a man was this Archer who had gone to South Africa to fight England and who as a hired man was no different in appearance at least, from every other hired man in North America? While I asked myself this question, Archer, his shirt open at the neck, was busy charming Hannah with the most banal conversation. The sense of humor which all the Irish possess provoked the girl to merry bursts of laughter, a laughter that aroused something within me that I could not define. . . . No, it was not love!

I became more sure of myself. Thoughts of Hannah did not come between me and my full enjoyment of the forest.

After having crossed my property I had still to pass through the fringe of trees to the east of Paul Durand's land in order to reach civilization. The Canadian summer is the season when the earth begins to yield its wealth. Wave after wave of gold swept over the wheat fields. Yes, a liquid sea, but still a sea of gold. Yellow and tawny gold. A sea of alchemy swaying to the wind's will. And then, too, the blue and silver oats. But was it equal to the forest?

If while returning with Paul Durand from a visit to the O'Molloys I drew upon the serenity of the open fields, it was only to prepare myself against the daily shock of my wanderings through the woods. And later, when I had entered my house I would stand leaning against the screen of the open window listening to the oppressive and irresistible rhythm of Life and Death.

Paul Durand would have doubtless become sentimental about it, too. He was not continually conquered and possessed by the image of Maggie with her bare arms and throat returning from the barn with a foaming pail of milk in either hand. . . . A wisp of smoke drifting low dissolved in the acid of

twilight, like a pearl in vinegar. The lazy jangle of a cow bell. A dog barked. Far, far away a train whistled. . . . If I have returned to the memory of this brief and passing moment, it is only as a point of departure in the description of my daily adventure in the woods.

For night has come. All the shadows of day, gliding slowly from east to west, have at last taken hands. Their dance in somber garments ends. . . . Like heralds, the deep-voiced owls and wolves question each other on their luck. Far off to the east a pair of wolves are prowling. The sharp yelping of the female announces that she lies in wait. The barking of the male informs her that he has caught the prey. Some beast has died that the wolf's mate might live. His mate and also the baby wolves that do not yet know how to hunt alone. No longer in the west flame the last remnants of day. Fireflies embroider the night with threads of fire. In the marsh the frogs croak. The barking dogs are civilization protecting itself. The night is full of groans and sighs. If I went to the swamp I would find, you may be sure, two moose fighting for a female. One of them would doubtless kill the other. But if I went as far as that the mosquitoes would suck away at least two ounces of my blood. Delight and pain! The great rhythm of Life and Death! O pastorals of the 18th century,

permit me to smile. Nature, Kind Nature, is a monster with blood stained claws.

I usually awoke early and in the first mists of dawn, a splendor shattered all too soon by the rising sun, I would go outside. I would call to my pony pastured near the house and give him oats. He would come toward me slowly, his tail swishing the ravenous mosquitoes from his flanks. He would rub his dapple-white head against my shoulder and then as he ate he would strike a bothersome fly from his belly with a hoof. After scratching him behind the ears and patting his neck I would enter the house and hastily prepare breakfast. For I am a man who must have his three square meals a day.

During the day the forest sleeps. Only at night is it really alive. Sated with food and love the beasts take their rest. But each morning some one of them is missing. Here, for example, is the hair and bloody remains of a doe. She passed timidly beneath this tree which still bears the traces of claws. A huge, hairy-eared lynx leaped onto her back and sank his fangs into her spine. Along the edge of this clearing lies a heap of feathers: an owl has feasted upon a partridge. Or along the borders of this swamp I find traces of blood where two moose fought a duel to

death. The conquerer has won the female; the prize he fought for.

Like strands of silk studded with jewels, a spider's web stretched between two trees catches the unwary fly. The shaggy spinner climbs and descends. The fly is disemboweled living. But in its turn a bird devours the spider.

Investigate the ground. The sand and grass teem with lyrics and with drama. What matters it if you do not know the names with which entomologists have baptized these gem-like insects. There is the delicate victory of the male over the female. A lyric! But what would you call the gratitude of the female who, taking advantage of the amorous lassitude of the male, devours him?

Kind Nature!

Should you smoke your pipe in the clearing you would recognize the various species of birds by their manner of flight. If you ask yourself why their manner of flight differs, you will be forced to conclude that it is due to the different insects each bird must catch or to the special dangers they must avoid. Here is a charming little titlark that sings so prettily it would be cruel to kill her. She dives from her branch in a tree, swoops almost to the ground, passes through the spider web, and sweeps upward again, the spider already in her little belly.

And even the plants and trees!

The trees strangle, crush, smother one another. The forest is full of traps, of botanic crimes! There are shrewd, premeditated aggressions. There are sudden, unforeseen attacks.

Ah, yes, believe me! I was right in strengthening my muscles and my will, in armoring my heart against pity, which is the destroyer of my true being.

Being thus strengthened by the instruction nature granted me, I had less fear of Hannah O'Molloy's insidious presence on those evenings when I visited her.

It was already the month of September and until darkness descended the thresher roared in the fields. I would see it against a clump of trees, in a cloud of wheat dust which the slanting rays of the sun transformed into a halo of golden mist. Standing in their empty wagons, pipes in their mouths, the farmers would return after having delivered their load of wheat at the nearest elevator.

Work and mutual help not only ironed out their differences but succeeded in creating harmony again. MacPherson, Grant, and Campbell helped O'Molloy haul the golden sheafs of wheat to the thresher, helped him feed them to the machine, and helped him haul the grain to the storehouse or elevator.

Mrs. O'Molloy and her two daughters continually baked pies, bread, and meat to appease the hunger of the hired men and of those neighbors who had lent their services. I myself offered to perform the difficult task of unloading the sacks of wheat and oats at the grain shed, and of checking them off on a blackboard so the owner of the machine would make no mistake.

Under the pretext that my work was the most arduous of all, Hannah and Maggie, their aprons coquettishly tied over their calico dresses continually appeared with pieces of custard, blueberry, or raisin pie and a cup of tea. How could Archer observe this without taking umbrage? Did he believe I was entirely indifferent to Hannah's charms? But was I really indifferent? At least to myself I pretended that I was.

On our way home in the wagon I told Paul Durand that I was already busily preparing for my annual expedition into the North to buy furs.

After scratching himself under his shirt, for the chaff from the thresher irritated his skin, he asked me what this mysterious trip to the North was like.

Today I feel no little remorse for having praised "The Great White Silence" in too glowing terms. One never remembers misery when it is passed. And

of the North there only remains the memory of that icy splendor which is unequalled elsewhere.

He kept silent while I, thanks to my memory, relished in advance the delights of the approaching adventure. Finally Paul interrupted me.

"Couldn't I go along with you?"

I paused a moment before answering for MacPherson's dogs, we were then passing his somnolent farmhouse, were baying at the moon.

"I doubt if you could stand the rigors of such a trip," I said. "Though I have described the beauties of the North, I have not told you that each time I return I swear never to attempt the trip again. No, not for anything in the world."

"But when winter comes you always go back there."

"Yes, because I am something of an adventurer. But each spring I take the same oath. 'Thanks! I have had enough winter and loneliness, enough snow and Northern Lights. Too often have I seen a sun multiplied by five and arranged in the form of a cross. Too often have I heard the fireworks of contracting ice explode under the pressure of renewed frost. I have had too many of those tiny fires that roast your belly while your back freezes. I have had enough of that thirst snow never quenches, enough of weeping eyes, of icicles that seal your lids to-

gether, enough . . .' It is a pledge I know by heart, but it's a drunkard's pledge!"

"But does the trip bring you much money?"

"Oh, a fair amount. But to me that's the least important matter. I have more money today than I really need to live comfortably. You know how I have simplified living. I lived an indolent life this summer after I had sold off all my horses. But my life does not bore me. I spend very little money, you know. Much less, as a matter of fact, than my small principal yields. My cartridges cost three cents apiece. A bag of flour, a tub of lard and a barrel of salt pork last me a long time. I do not care to live in a more civilized manner. I consider myself very happy as I am. But the winter calls me imperiously to the North and I do not know how to refuse."

"I should like to earn a little money."

"But Great heavens! Don't you live well enough on your farm? Moreover you have a family in France who now and then send you a fairly large sum of money."

"Maggie's tastes are not so simple as mine," he confessed.

"Ah, always the woman! Here is Maggie making decisions for you! And you want to earn a few thousand dollars in a hurry so you can call her Mrs. Durand the sooner."

"It's been a whole year since I fell in love with her," he murmured. "Don't make fun of me."

"I, making fun of you! That's not my intention at all."

"It seems to me that you yourself are in love with Hannah. Maggie thinks so and Archer is terribly jealous. Maggie thinks Hannah has a soft spot in her heart for you, too."

"I never think of getting married. I am too definitely a son of Adventure to settle down. Besides, I think Maggie is mistaken. Hannah doesn't care for me. Archer pleases her much more than I do. He's of the same nationality as she."

"Do you really think that is important? Maggie loves me and I am a Frenchman like you."

He tugged at the reins, for the horses, eager to reach home, had broken into a gallop.

"Why don't you want me to go along?" he asked.

"But I didn't say I didn't want you to come along. On the contrary I have always looked for a companion to go with me on one of these expeditions. But those until now who have offered to go with me were men I could not sleep near in peace. Nine out of every ten of those men who lead that terrible life, and I assure you it is terrible, would be capable of murdering their companion to rob him of his possessions. When I am up North and see a white man

I at once put as many miles between him and me as I possibly can. I feel safe only among the Indians."

"Will you take me then?"

"I didn't mean that. First of all you must be absolutely certain that you are physically and morally able to stand the life up there."

"To be that I suppose I should be an athlete like you who can jump as high as he is tall and juggle a hundred and fifty pound bag of wheat."

"No, I do not think so. That is of no real importance. What a traveler in the North needs above everything is endurance. At one moment he is on the brink of death and the next moment he is alive. He must always be able to win that next moment."

"But if you do it, why can't I?"

I enjoyed hearing him talk like this. I remembered that pride had more than once saved my life. The spirit with which he uttered the words made me say:

"All right. You can."

"Maggie and I will be eternally grateful to you," he replied with a fervor that was both touching and absurd.

What had made the boy want to marry Maggie? To use an expression common in France, he needed a woman. Thus Paul Durand with no social, intel-

lectual or even racial ties to connect him to her, longed with every atom of his being to marry this simple Irish lass who did not speak a word of his language. He, himself, could not even speak hers fluently. His gallicisms, his accent, would always subject him to his wife's laughter and perhaps ridicule. But that was his own business.

I felicitated myself for the wisdom of having kept free of Hannah. Moreover she was a perfect wife for Archer, if that pugnacious Irishman was not a noble in disguise. But I, great grief! (Where is the little French girl who used that expression so delightfully six years ago? Snows of yesteryear!) Could anyone have imagined me marrying this simple farm girl incapable of honoring any part of this world's true wealth: dawn in her cloak of gauze, the opal twilight, the nights glittering with sapphires and diamonds, and all the architecture of the skies? All this was mine, only mine, and it sufficed me. Hannah! Return to the realms of forgetfulness. Marry the man with flaming hair if you wish to. You and I have nothing in common. I am a son of Adventure and ennobled by it. You are not even a servant in its palace!

With these thoughts in mind the night passed. It was already three o'clock. In two hours and a half the trumpets of dawn would sound. But I could not

sleep, in spite of a hot bath I had taken when I had reached home, and in spite of the fresh sheets Sarah Gosselin, the old toothless half-breed, had laundered for me. . . . A wolf hunted hardly three hundred feet from my house. "Good luck, brother," I shouted. "Kill and glut your hunger. Then sleep all day long, cozy and warm on your bed of dry leaves!"

"Why did Paul ever decide to go up North with you?" Maggie asked me. "In two months winter will be here. It's the season for dancing. What good times we could have had together! When all the work has been done I will ask papa to get old man Gosselin to come. He can play all kinds of dances on his violin. I would have had such a good time dancing with Paul!"

"Here is a French proverb for you, Maggie. 'Those who are absent are always wrong.' "

"We say just the opposite. 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder.' Well, I'm Irish and I'll live according to that proverb, and Paul, who's French, can live by yours. It's he who will forget."

I secretly hoped so. All things considered, if Paul Durand could bring home something valuable from his trip it would, in my opinion, be worth more than furs or money—it would be forgetfulness. A

good thing for me to remember myself, against the day when I, too, would fall stupidly in love.

The bronze bugles of autumn sounded the call for departure. On the leaden slate of the skies flocks of geese traced their fleeting triangles. Ducks flew swiftly through the clear nights, their necks extended, uttering the jubilant cries of passage. The melancholy voice of the bittern no longer chanted the desolation of marshes. The silvery sculpture of dawn, evaporated by the sun, was sublimated into red and purple motes that hung twinkling in the air. Earlier one heard the bells of cows a shepherd clad in buff linen had driven home with all the memories of the day. Becoming ripe suddenly, the fruit of the pembina gleamed in the woods like bunches of coral set in golden patine. The muskrats hastened to build their houses in the swamp and to store away the tender rush roots for their winter's food. Everything urged us to our departure.

During these last days Paul Durand was too excited to be of much use to me. While I scoured the country on horseback hunting for a couple who would take care of Paul's stock and mine during the winter, Paul wore out his horses and the wheels

of his buggy on the winding and furrowed road that led him to the O'Molloys.

I accompanied him rarely. When I went there Hannah and Archer teased Paul, or Frenchy as they called him, on his suddenly assumed profession of fur-trader. O'Molloy left off counting the money the sale of his wheat had brought him, to praise the virtues of a warm house in winter, when the thermometer itself withdraws into the depths of its glass burrow and refuses any longer to register the vagaries of frost. Like the wild beasts shouldn't man have a right to build a protective roof over his back? Or did we know how to shiver hard enough to keep ourselves warm? And again, did Paul think the cold of Athabaska-Mackenzie was less bitter than that of the northeast of Saskatchewan? Really saddened by the dismal picture evoked by her husband, Mrs. O'Molloy shivered under her flannel jacket and nodded her long, bony head with its jutting, yellow teeth. Hairpins kept falling from the small knot of hair on the top of her head and she would stick them back with her thin fingers. Maggie remained silent, her jaw set, and her eyes angrily fastened upon me. She doubtless blamed me for robbing her of her dancer.

"You ought to take Archer along," Hannah

joked. "His hair would supply you with a never-failing fire."

Archer did not seem to relish the joke.

I was of course accustomed to these lonely departures. But it seemed as if Paul expected at any moment to hear the rapid footsteps of an excited girl hurrying toward him across the platform. But no one appeared. The station was an old abandoned freight car derailed at one side of the platform, divided into compartments and smelling of the soft coal that burned in a large cherry-colored stove. There were no tender farewells. A handkerchief which my companion evidently intended using in the classic signal of distress, served to wipe his eyes. They had suddenly become too bright and they were ringed with swollen lids. I accepted his excuse that dust had got into them. It was easy for me to look the other way.

The train having pulled out I was at once carried to Capri, set in an emerald sea, and to a period far in the past. My machine for traversing the ages was a little volume of Suetonius which, without respect for its value as a rare edition, I always placed in my pocket whenever I set forth upon any Adventure. But it was a convenient size and its binding of parchment would stand anything. I reproached it

only for its minute italics, for when the light grew dim they put my eyes to a severe strain. As well as I can recall it was published in the early part of the 17th century and its title page bore a picture of a gryphon with the inscription *"Lugduni apud Antonium Gryphium."* It disgusted me less to picture Tiberius wallowing in an aquatic debauch, than it depressed me to behold a young man of twenty-four weeping for so small a matter as that of departing without an image of the inconsolable grief of his fiancée. Oh well, Maggie had been right.

In the midst of an interesting sentence, I was unable to work out the meaning of a verb, and I wandered through the labyrinth of Latin grammar, without succeeding in restoring to the paragraph the exact sense that Suetonius had certainly given it. Canadian trains are the best of their kind, but, alas, they do not carry Latin grammars.

I must have struggled a long time against the rebel word (and an unsubdued rebel it was) for when I finally raised my eyes from the book, Paul Durand was asleep. He slept because he had probably passed a bad night. I preferred to believe that like Condé on the eve of the battle of Rocrot he was now in full possession of his peace of mind. What better could he do than sleep, now that the distance swiftly increased between us and that

O'Molloy farm to which his heart had been so madly fastened? Weary of struggling with the lawless verb, I in my turn dozed off.

At Athabaska Landing I planned to buy dogs and sleds. As the railroad did not extend that far we had to travel there in a wagon over the rough road that led from Edmonton.

Paul Durand was a rank novice, so it was useless to count upon his help in loading our traps. There were too many tricks he did not know. No mathematician can solve the problem of the center of gravity with the exactness of a professional fur-trader. And there is no text-book that can teach you how to lash the luggage to the sled.

It is a curious fact that sled dogs who obey at the first snap of their master's whip, take it as a bad joke when his companion attempts to give them orders. They laugh in their own way, which consists in baring their wolf fangs, and if anyone shows the slightest fear, they reverse the role and have bad taste enough to make jokes themselves. If I had not struck the leader in time with the butt end of my whip Paul would have lost at least three fingers. The dog had only time to bite his mitten and make a useless rag of it. And Paul? Heavens, how awkward he was, but he gave no signs of being a coward.

"Watch out how you treat the dogs," said I,

"for if you aren't careful, Maggie will marry a cripple."

However, I had had excellent good fortune in making up my team. Out of the eight dogs, three had belonged to me the previous winter. I re-purchased them not without paying a considerable premium to the half-breed to whom I had sold them when I landed in town on my way south. I knew what they could do. Doubtless they also knew what I could do, for they wagged their tails when they recognized me. I at once put an end to their familiarity, for a husky is always a husky and even if you are fond of him he must not know it in too certain a manner. To impress them I ostentatiously uncoiled the long lash of my whip. Squatting on their hind quarters they watched me. When I stuck the whip into my belt they rose and laying their ears back began tugging at the harness. I was their master who never struck the innocent, but who pitilessly chastised them for their more venial faults.

Under the cold and sunny sky of November our trail, packed hard, stretched toward the North. The sky was pale but cloudless. A magnificent wintry sun sparkled in iridescent colors upon the snow. A frosty wind pinched our cheeks playfully as if to command our blood to circulate. I was again a trader bound for the Great North!

CHAPTER FOUR

Barren Lands

IT was early in February. We were bound home after our visit to the North—a shorter visit than I had expected. We had turned east on the advice of a Chippewa Indian who had crossed our trail. Good fortune had blessed us.

We had already traveled more than thirty days which, due to the load on our sleds, halts, and the necessity of nursing the dogs' strength and that of Paul Durand, would represent four hundred and fifty or five hundred miles at most. We had found Indians far enough away from the outposts of the Hudson Bay Company and of Revillon Freres to be tempted by our cotton goods, our packages of tobacco, our knives, our glass beads, our hatchets, and our rifles. Moreover we had this one advantage over all the official outposts: we sold fire water. Doubtless this exposed us to the severity of the law, but it was, however, in the best French tradition. We traded as Cavelier de la Salle and du Lhut had

traded. The important thing is to use the liquor discreetly.

There is a certain way of handling it which permits you to avoid all scandal. And why should a corporal of the Mounted Police brave a temperature of twenty, thirty, or forty degrees below zero to catch a couple of beggarly traders.

I took advantage of the spirit of hospitality liquor produced. I knew enough of the Chippewa language to be able to joke with the girls or to understand the boastful tales of the old folk. While one purchases furs there is no reason for being bored in an Indian camp.

The Indians live in a large tepee of tanned skins with a small fire continually burning at the center of the floor. While the young men are out hunting and the old women out gathering dry wood, the chief, squatting or lying on his back, smokes and gossips. He has so many interesting things to tell! He recounts the story of his life and his everyday existence is enough to make a white man dream. But best of all, he tells you how the white men acted who visited him before you came and if you have a little misplaced pride for your race, his tales will knock it into a cocked hat. "You are less of a thief than the others," is a compliment a white man cannot ignore. Meanwhile the eldest daughter displays

her admiration for you by tossing little twigs into your face. Her father smiles indulgently.

Paul Durand, however, remained obdurate before this attractive flirtation with twigs. (Indian love making, the French Canadians call it.) Taciturn, irresponsive, he was obviously longing for the charms of his Maggie O'Molloy. I refrained from questioning him. But I knew, without his telling me, that he yearned for the evenings back home, where to the sound of a devilish violin the girls danced Virginia reels and one-steps, or snuggled up against you, giggling nervously. There the mistress of the house passed around pies, buns, and tea; but if a guest had the slightest notion of the social amenities he would hide a jug of whiskey in the snow outdoors and from time to time would mysteriously invite his host and two or three friends to visit it with him. They would shout "Ho!" take a swig and return indoors. To me all this seemed far, far away. But to this young man, blindly, desperately in love, it was near, though unutterably beyond reach.

But we were now on our way home, our sleds loaded down with fine furs. The runners cried out as they slid over the frozen snow, while our snowshoes accompanied their melody with a brisk and

metrical zip-zip-zip-zip. Tirelessly I trod down a path for the first sled. Behind me struggled the huskies, similar to the wolves whose sons they were, shuffling along, taciturn, their hair bristling, snapping at the snow to moisten their throats. Behind them walked Paul Durand on an already beaten track and followed by his team.

I remember that it was very cold. But it was fine weather. The sky was pale and clear and the sun at noon indulged in a fantastic play of light. As if to mock the cold, the sun multiplied itself by two or four images, attached to it by one or two extended diameters in the form of a luminous Maltese cross. It circumscribed them all with a huge circle composed of fragmentary rainbows marvelously welded to each other. It gleamed with all the colors of a prism, hurling one color after the other towards the earth, and then flinging them towards that mysterious point in the zenith where their simultaneous arrival resolved them all into white light. It was both mocking and weird. A feast of light, but a feast to which one was invited by forty-five degrees below zero.

The bones of our forehead and temples ached from being contracted by the cold. All of the face that was exposed to the cold felt the need of packing its constituent cells tightly together in the vain

hope that they would produce a mutual warmth. They succeeded only in producing the painful sensation of prisoners who are locked in too narrow a prison. Our beards and mustaches grew longer. The congealing vapor of our breath froze into icicles. Their weight pulled at the hairs. We had to melt the ice by placing our heavily mittened hands over it, but a moment later icicles would form again.

But this was our least difficulty. For February brought us bad weather. To begin with the moon rose surrounded by a vast halo, very picturesque, but unfortunately something more than that. The stars seemed larger, but they sparkled less. When night came the wolves howled ever more dismally. Our dogs themselves seemed to cower before an invisible but approaching danger.

Had we been in a sheltered locality I should have ordered a halt. But we were then traversing a desolate section of the silent North known as the Barren Lands. And barren they were indeed. Barren under the snow. Chastely barren. Cruelly barren. Perhaps a long trek would enable us to gain the woods, a place of refuge and, though I did not say as much to Paul Durand I nevertheless said it to myself: Safety!

I quickened our pace. In spite of the intense cold that froze the snow until it crumbled into a fine powder which filtered through my snow-shoes like sifted flour, I felt a profuse perspiration bathing me in its frigid oil. In this impalpable snow that nevertheless weighted and tired my muscles, my long snow-shoes sank a foot deep. Behind me the huskies sank another half-foot deeper than I had. At the risk of exhausting my strength I often turned to look behind me. Courageous, growling, stubborn, the dogs tugged at their harness, their great, bony bodies straining forward. The runners of the sled shrilled over the snow as if they screamed with cold. Hooded, his head bent forward to expose the least possible amount of flesh to the whetted razors of frost, Paul valiantly lengthened his stride and quickened the rhythm of his snow-shoes—that rhythm I had had so much difficulty in teaching him and which he had at last conquered. I smiled as I remembered his first falls. Would he hold out?

A dark spot rose before me. It was, no doubt about it, a forest, that is to say, shelter. No doubt? Yes! A forest? Or a mirage? A mi. .mi. .mi. .mi. .rage! The syllables of the word danced before my eyes until they almost made me dizzy. Thus the extraordinary charm of the palpitation of light upon the snow was destroyed, the play of light whose

beauty ordinarily helped me to ignore weariness and the unpleasantness of cold. But the syllables of the word mirage continued to dance before me, to whirl like figures in a demonic carnival. Mi. .mi. .mi. .mi. .ra. .ra. .ra. .ge. Mi. .mi. .mi. . Vertigo so weakened my knees that I strove desperately to master the terrible charm of the word.

By a desperate effort of will I recovered my senses. I realized that we must quicken our pace even more. I would march on swifter than the word mi . . . No, I would not let myself pronounce the word again. I turned my attention to the syllable 'rage'. Rage! Yes, rage on, then, you beast tracked to your death! Rage! Rage!

Then as if my will had borne fruit, the forest hidden behind a high drift of snow rose above it and came towards me as if in welcome. It was not a mirage. From now on I could pronounce the word and its syllables would not dance before me. The forest was a real forest and we would soon reach it.

I must have slowed my pace slightly without being aware of doing so, for the leader trod on my snow-shoe and I tumbled. I scrambled to my feet immediately and began brushing the stinging snow from my neck and ears where it had penetrated through my hood. I felt my right ear tingling with

a sharp pain. It was frostbitten! I rubbed it so briskly with my gloved hand that tears came to my eyes. And then suddenly to my horror the forest, the snow, everything vanished. I was snow-blind!

It was an accident that had happened to me once before and I realized there was no reason to lose my head about it. This snow-blindness is a natural reaction to the play of brilliant colors and the dazzling gleam of the snow. It had never lasted for more than a few minutes.

I reached behind me and felt the rough, frost-encrusted hair of the leader's head. He let me touch him. He was more submissive than his kind usually are, which is not saying very much. I mean by this that he did not rip open the hand that touched him and that he even condescended to wag the icy cylinder of hair which served him for a tail. I passed my hand over his back. He was panting. I knew the exhausted team of huskies were lying down.

I called to Paul. He replied in a strangely distant voice. It seemed as if his words were frozen. I shouted to him that I had just gone blind but that it was nothing serious.

"Come over here," I shouted. "You lead my team and I will follow along behind your sled by holding onto it."

"But I'm blind too," he moaned. "Ever since the team halted I have stared straight ahead and it's just as if the light had burnt out my eyes."

"Don't move then," I called. "And I'll try to find you."

I succeeded in turning, but not without a fall. At the risk of being bitten by one of the huskies I guided my way back to the sled by following the harness. I reached the sled. Finally my hand touched something alive. It was Paul who had collapsed on the load of furs. He was moaning. I asked him to make an effort to rise. He succeeded, but his success cost me my balance and I fell. I had to remove my snow-shoes in order to get to my feet again. Then in the deathly cold I had to strap on my snow-shoes with my bare hands. Before my eyes whirled shadows, but they were *white shadows,* like dancing figures of light.

"What will we do?" Paul groaned.

I thought the first thing to do was to prevent ourselves from freezing to death where we stood. I said that we must hold up each other and try to walk. The blindness would soon leave one of us and then we would be all right. And I began laughing. My laughter must have rung frightfully false, for Paul cried:

"Don't laugh like that. It's awful!"

"Come, let's move along," said I. "Let's walk before we freeze where we stand. It's at least fifty below."

I took his arm. We moved forward a few steps and fell. We struggled to our feet. I saw the ridiculous side of it and as we clung to each other I shouted into his ear that I would give a pretty penny to see the spectacle we were making of ourselves. Two drunkards never appeared funnier. He replied sharply that there was nothing to joke about. And I, becoming suddenly angry, shouted that a man who hadn't energy to laugh didn't deserve to live. I thought I heard him sob and that redoubled my fury. I shook him so brutally that we both fell to the ground. I rose, but he refused to.

"Well, then, freeze to death, you fool," I cried. "If you are as yellow as that, freeze!"

I moved on, fell again, rose, and fell again. Furious, racked with pain, struggling to my feet for the thirtieth time at least, I removed my snowshoes and sank breast-deep into the powdery snow. I realized that a drift had formed there and intuition told me that it were better for me to stay where I was than to stagger along like a madman and fall like a drunkard. Furiously, I enlarged the hole I had made when I fell. Then I crouched down at the bottom. There I rested a moment, somewhat pro-

tected from the snow and even from the cold above me. It was not warm there but at least the warmth of my blood was sufficient to keep me from freezing. I at once began attending to my eyes. Stripping off my mittens I laid the palms of my bare hands against my pupils. At the same time I asked myself whether it were better to lose my eyes or to lose my hands, if during the operation they should become frozen. I decided it was better to be a cripple than a blind man. But when the fingers of my left hand grew numb, I considered it much better to remain blind. I immediately began working over my hand and while I was busy trying to revive its circulation, sight suddenly returned. I do not know why, but I broke into so strange a laugh that it frightened me. Had I gone mad? I sought to discipline myself. I succeeded in my efforts by reciting the first few lines of Virgil's Bucolics. This unpremeditated leap of mine over thousands of miles and through twenty centuries, to Virgil singing of his sunny lands, restored my reason in a land of ice. Another moment and I had completely recovered. Then I remembered Paul.

When I had clambered out of the hole, the cold assailed me again. Frozen sweat enveloped me in a leaden armor of ice. The cold was hard to withstand. It bore down on my shoulders, on my back, it

weighted my legs. But after I had bound my snowshoes to my moccasins, my will itself seemed to throw off some of this weight. A movement of my shoulders, a movement of my back divested them of the heaviest part of the crushing burden of cold. Only my legs remained weighted by its imponderable chains. Nevertheless I must escape from all this misery. (And again I swore the oath I have never been able to keep; that I would not again return to the frozen North.) Shading my eyes I scrutinized the vast expanse of the snow-covered plain.

At first I forced myself to see it only as pure whiteness. For henceforth I knew what it would cost to enjoy the play of light and color on the snow.

"There is so much splendor that I was dazzled by it," I said to myself.

Firmly renouncing my former pleasure, I obeyed my resolution to see it only as a whiteness. I surveyed the horizon, a flat and miserable horizon, a horizon without a mirage. Without a mi. .mi. .mi. .rage! I turned slowly. The sun was sinking, sinking. . . .

Far to the east, much farther than the limit of my terrifying shadow, I beheld a speck of gray. It was the teams and sleds. But where was Paul? Where in God's name was he? I started forth in the direction of the sleds.

On my way I first came across the confused wanderings of my tracks. Then I found our double tracks. I followed them. How many times had we fallen? What! As many times as that?

I lifted an insensible body from the snow. Paul was not dead, he had been lying in a deep drift. When I shook him he groaned. I loaded him onto my shoulders. God, how I sank into the snow! But I must stagger on toward the sleds. I must not weep because I am cold and in pain. I must reach the sleds, yes, I must reach them.

Fumbling in a gunny sack I found a bottle of whiskey. I forced Paul's teeth apart and poured a little of the life-giving fluid into his mouth. What determination I had to muster to refuse myself a drop or two! But no. Though the brute in me clamored for drink even at the risk of perishing, my mind knew how whiskey cuts the legs of a weary man from under him. No. Temperate to the end. And strong . . . and young. I vanquished the clamoring beast of my body.

I wrapped Paul Durand in all the blankets. I muffled even his head. Then unloading the furs from his sled I placed him upon it, and set his team in motion toward the forest.

Toward the forest? Where was it? Ah yes, over there. Farther on. I sighed. For as I started to leave,

a miser was suddenly born in me. I could not refrain from turning my eyes toward the snowdrift surmounted by Paul's snow-shoes where a fortune in furs lay. . . . But I reached the forest and managed to light a fire.

Tomorrow, yes tomorrow, I promised myself, after a brief rest I would return for the furs.

When the fire was blazing I had to eat something. My own life, and even to a greater extent that of my companion, depended on my own egotism.

"Don't bother about your friend!" an inner voice whispered. "Eat the good pemmican purchased from Indians. Fill that interior stove of yours with the rich and greasy fuel of pemmican. Crush it between your teeth, chew those dried fruits the provident hand of a squaw has pounded up with fat and crude, dry meat."

Having satisfied my hunger I took my hatchet and in a few minutes had chopped down enough poles to erect a lean-to on the side where I had cleared away the snow. Using our coats and blankets I made it wind-proof. This rough shelter raised the temperature at least forty degrees. Like a rubber in a Turkish bath I, clad in my embroidered moccasins and my filthy shirt, massaged the gaunt and lice-

ridden body of Durand. Its withered and filthy nakedness contrasted strangely with the white, immaculate snow. Thank God, he revived and I dressed him. A few gulps of hot tea transformed him into a living being. Pale and still blind he smiled at me brightly. And his first words were: "I will see Maggie again."

At that moment I had other matters to think about. I enjoy my reveries. But I must always be certain that I can realize them. No dream would henceforth be possible, either for him—poor, helpless being whom I must save from death—or for me, if I did not exert every effort in the struggle for survival. I changed my underclothes and took advantage of my temporary nakedness to rub my body with whiskey. A half bottle went for this purpose, but I had used it only externally. I pondered as I watched Paul tranquilly asleep. I, a person entirely refreshed must now worship and sacrifice to the God of Fire. It responded to my devotions by thawing my body. Still anchored to their sleds the harnessed dogs reflected the flames of the fire in their wolf eyes. Already the bivouac of the Great North had regained its charm.

I passed a large part of the night sitting sleepless before the fire. Alternating tea, tobacco, and pemmican I supplied my body with those elements my

heart, a faithful servant, intelligently and without complaint directed toward their proper places. Here the tea, there the grease, and now the pleasure of tobacco stimulated my mind. But because of Paul Durand, I could not dream of sleeping for longer than two hours. It was not until a short while before dawn, at the hour when a Northern night is blackest, that I at last closed my eyes.

When I awoke a few coals still glowed in the ashes of the fire. A handful of dry sticks set it to dancing again in the half-light of morning, made it leap into playful blue and orange flames; a marriage of colors that celebrated the mystic union of mineral elements liberated from their organic prison. Thus one day the atoms of my own body would dance jubilantly when Death the Alchemist would deliver them from their prison. And indeed Death, to whom I had spoken so familiarly the day before, did not, now that I knew him better, appear to me as so evil a being. Once again that fierce love of life I bore within me had not destroyed, even in the face of Death, the joy of being a living man who acted and thought. Indeed my suffering was merely a ladder to scale the pinnacle of happiness. And Paul?

His forehead was warm, a little too warm in fact.

He was talking in his sleep, or rather to be more accurate, he was delirious. I heard him murmur the word "Maggie."

"Come!" said I. "The girl has really bewitched you. Blind fool! Can't you put your dreams to better profit than to recreate memories of a wench? I am going to eat."

I distributed their carefully rationed pieces of frozen fish to the huskies. Whip ready, I saw that none of them got more than his share. Quick to take advantage of any inattention on my part, the thieves watched me while they tore ravenously at their food. A silvery pulp glistened in their red jaws. When they had eaten I threw more wood on the fire and took one team with me to recover the furs I had abandoned the day before.

I returned to camp none too soon. Already the wind toiled like a worker crouching over his task of grinding the snow. A hard, sharp dust swept along the ground. I knew that it would not be long before the wind would raise whirling clouds of icy dust that would drive all life from the white expanse. The wolves themselves would burrow into snowdrifts. In the woods where the undergrowth was thickest, herds of caribou, elks, or moose would gather, their heads together so that only their flanks would be exposed to the wind.

A blizzard was coming, the ferocious and omnipotent blizzard, devourer of all animal life. Once again the ring round the moon had prognosticated correctly. Provident, egotistic, but in my vital egotism a savior of life, I stored three days' provisions within close reach of the lean-to before attending to Paul. Then I cut up a sufficient amount of dry wood. A large fire is not necessary to sustain life, and to sustain it in comfort, when you are sheltered in a tent eight feet long, eight feet wide, and five feet high. (Such was the space between the walls of snow and the lean-to I had constructed.) The essential thing is not to cease adoring and sacrificing to the God of Fire with little offerings of dry wood. I felt the hard, strong-willed and superstitious soul of a distant ancestor forming within me, an ancestor who in prehistoric times had struggled against cold, famine and weariness. Like him I would triumph. I was of his race through hundreds and hundreds of generations.

I awoke Paul who was still blind. However, he informed me that he could vaguely distinguish the fire. He had a high fever which I strove to subdue with weak, but very hot tea. While the wind shook and tortured the bony aspens above our lean-to, I cooked some pemmican broth for my companion. I had no little trouble in getting him to take it. He

was a man who had given himself up, which is the same as saying he was a man who had surrendered himself to Death.

Did he suffer? He assured me that he did not. But he felt very weak. He spoke to me at length about Maggie.

"There," said I to myself, "is the force which might help him to make a stand against death."

In my turn I talked to him about Maggie.

"If you marry Hannah," he remarked, "we will be brothers-in-law."

"Good," thought I, "we will get you out of this. You won't die today at least." And I made him swallow a second cup of broth and a little whiskey in some boiling hot tea. Then I let him sleep. But in the blizzard I was obliged for the safety of my companion to forbear almost all sleep for a period of three days and three nights. There was a plentiful supply of food so that I could eat tremendous quantities and I drank an abundance of strong, unsweetened tea. From time to time I permitted myself to doze off, certain that some inexplicable instinct would awake me when the fire needed more fuel.

Obedient to that mysterious ternary law, the blizzard abated on the evening of the third day. Paul Durand had recovered his sight the day before. At

the same time his fever had departed, leaving him only with a bad cough. He had recovered his appetite. I decided that we must rest for another day. I took advantage of the subsiding blizzard, while the woods still roared with the clash of wind shaken branches, to go hunting.

At the end of about half an hour I happened to come upon a small clearing, bordered by dogwood. The twigs had recently been chewed off. It was a sign that moose were in the immediate vicinity. Nearby my snow-shoes sank through the powdery layer of new-fallen snow into a hollow where the snow was packed and hard. It must have been trampled down just before the storm. Leaning against an aspen I listened in the direction of the wind. Night would soon descend and it was likely that the moose, now that the wind had abated, were searching for food to appease their hunger. My hopes were not deceived. The noise I heard, a noise that sounded as if someone were rhythmically scraping a great wooden bow against the branches of a tree, was still at some distance from me. I removed my snow-shoes and wading waist deep through the snow I slowly and noiselessly made my way in the direction of the sound. It grew louder. It sounded as if men, heavily burdened, were marching through the underbrush. Motionless, knowing that something

was coming toward me, I slipped the mitten from my right hand. The icy barrel of my gun bit into my fingers mercilessly. But I wished to kill, to kill in order that I might live. Through the twilight suddenly loomed three huge heads, hairy, long, with vast horns; the heads of three enormous moose. They were hardly twenty-five paces from me. As I was directly in front of them they did not see me. I raised my rifle cautiously and aimed at the breast of the one in the center. I fired and the recoil flung me backwards. The beast stopped short, and began swaying from side to side. Then he took one, two, three steps forward, staggering as if drunk. It was both macabre and ridiculous. At the third step he halted, stood motionless a moment and then suddenly smitten by death, lunged forward and dropped his muzzle between his outstretched forelegs. I could have shot his companions, but I was too barbarous for useless slaughter. I let them flee.

I returned to camp, my face smeared with blood I had drunk from the neck of my victim, good, warm blood that gurgled out from an incision I had made with my knife. But it was life and warmth that I drank. All the life force of the slaughtered moose now ran through my veins. A rich, warm blood circulated through them. I lighted a small fire, and dismembered the animal carefully, laying aside

its heart, kidneys and liver to broil for supper. With a secret and disturbing lust I chewed morsels of the raw, warm and savory flesh as I, loaded down with twenty or twenty-five pounds of meat wrapped in a strip of skin, made my way back to camp. After having eaten supper under a cold and starry sky—from time to time I could hear the sharp explosion of a frost-riven tree—I led the dogs to the slaughtered beast. I let them feast for an hour while under my legs there lived and died at my will a minute fire of twigs that warmed my stomach and thighs deliciously. Wolves howled with hunger. But the dogs having answered them they did not dare approach.

I imagine that the following day must have been bitterly cold. But we were not conscious of it. Meat, good fresh meat, had revived the simple tastes of savages within us. It was a profound joy to eat our fill. And when I really seemed to have eaten enough, I could fall asleep, for Paul Durand was undeniably better.

Thus having recovered our strength during our four days of rest we could now, trekking toward the southwest, make our way toward civilization.

We were still far from home and we had all the hazards of storm, onslaughts of ennui (hardly less

terrifying), and the dangers of sudden thaws to reckon with. So, urging on the huskies who had grown fat during our four days' halt, I quickened our pace. I continually extended the distance of our daily trek. We set out well before daylight, in that darkness which immediately precedes dawn. And we halted only when night had descended, after those too brief hours of blinding daylight and those long hours when the west is bordered with a light fringe of fading purple.

At supper time Paul Durand, warming himself before the fire, would usually talk of Maggie.

Thus by the magic of words, O'Molloy's farm would be transported hundreds of miles to the North, into a land where there was little hope of grain elevators and dairy farms ever being established. While Paul talked to me about Maggie I would enjoy a little bucolic picture. I would hear the cowbells of Jerseys and Holsteins that were being driven home to the barn by a white and buff collie. And Hannah dressed exactly as I had first seen her would carry foaming pails of milk from the barn to the farmhouse. It is ridiculous to believe that O'Molloy's farm could enjoy a perpetual spring. But it did nevertheless. And it was there with us in the desert of snow and ice, in the luminous palpitation of northern lights. It was clad in warmth and

all the dust of verdure exploded there in an impalpable and imperishable green powder. In those cruel and bitter days O'Molloy's farm became soft and gentle. Hannah was enough to people this solitude.

Thus did the days pass until the following disaster.

Yes, I should have suspected. For four or five days Paul had been bothered by a little hacking cough. He breathed with difficulty. I had always found that forty or fifty degrees below zero quickly cures one of a slight cold. However, Paul's cough seemed to resist this rigorous and usually efficacious cure. I finally realized to my dismay that Paul had frozen his lungs. That was it! There was a spot of blood on the snow where he had spat.

What was there to do? And did Paul himself realize the seriousness of his condition?

When we arrived at a place to camp, he collapsed into a lifeless mass and refused food. After a long spell of coughing that produced hectic spots about his cheek bones, blood suddenly rose to his mouth. He wiped it away with the back of his sleeve and suddenly turning to one side, he buried his face in his arms. I watched his shoulders shake with sobbing. He had understood.

This onslaught of despair did not last for long. Indeed his face brightened with a fine smile of courage when he turned to me and said:

"After all, it's no one's fault. You will tell her that I thought of her."

Laughing, and how false it rang in my own ears, I told him he must not think of dying. He shrugged his shoulders which produced a renewed attack of coughing.

"Do you think I don't realize my condition? Of course there isn't any way of writing to a person here, not even anything to write a will with. So you must tell her by word of mouth what I say to you. Try hard to remember all I tell you. Tell her that she can still be happy with another man, with someone besides me." (Here he paused to cough and I had to help him sit up.) "Give her my cattle and my share when the furs are sold. Don't bother with the land, I haven't a clear title to it yet. You'll give her the furs, won't you?"

"But you aren't going to die. Put that idea out of your head."

"It's true!" he said impatiently. "Do you think I don't know how to die as bravely as anyone?"

To watch over a dying man is never a pleasant thing to do. But this picnic with death in an open

desert of snow reached the extremes of horror. One would have believed that when darkness had veiled the tragedy of a face struggling with the Beyond, my task as nurse would have been less horrible. But it was not.

In the evening he made me promise I would not abandon his body in that lonely place, that I would carry it with me and bury it with all due ceremony in Christian ground. Considering the difficulties of the voyage, it was madness to promise it. But so irresistible is the power a dying man wields over one who is healthy and strong, that I granted his wish. And when I gave him my promise he ceased speaking.

I imagine he was then visited by familiar spirits for he began talking in a low voice to invisible persons. Many of them must have been old inhabitants of the land he was about to enter. He conversed with his mother, with his grandmother, and with his grandfather, all three of whom I knew to be dead. But there were also living ghosts. His father scolded him for something he had done twenty years before, when he was only a small, unreasoning child. His misdeed and its punishment haunted him even during his dying moments in this distant land where he lay in agony under a poor blanket by a miserable fire. And Maggie stood at his feet and he told her

things I only half comprehended, but they hurt me to hear them. The worst of it was that I had to eat to overcome my weariness and the cold, but I experienced rather a desire to vomit.

Towards morning, at the hour when shadows are darkest, I heard the death rattle in his throat. I cast some wood on the fire that the flames might disperse the gloom around us. I leaned over him, but he could not have seen me. I heard the rattle in his chest. He must have already exhaled the odor of a corpse for slowly, brutally, one of my dogs began howling. It was plaintive, solemn, menacing and the other dogs took up the cry. I could have murdered them all!

Did they realize that their baying, their ritual cry, was the age-old call of their race to a slaughtered quarry? If they did not realize it, I did, and I longed to whip them one after the other. But my life was bound by unbreakable ties to theirs. The wolves understood the cry. What was for me a painful, a tragic event, was for them a joyful one. In a few minutes Paul would be one of the sacred dead whose body I must protect, but to the wolves he would be a slaughtered quarry to devour. At two miles to the north a wolf took up the call of the huskies, and another took up the call in the south. Then I counted two more in the east and I do not remember

how many in the west. Sometimes they made their death call one after another and sometimes they made the call in unison. The circle of their hungry jaws closed in about us.

CHAPTER FIVE

Burial and Furs

HE died at the hour when the stars had begun to flicker out one by one and the black curtain of the velvet sky was being drawn aside in the east, revealing a window of milky jade opening on infinity. The snow was still tinged with blue and the woods with a deep brown. But now behind the jade window, green and gold lights were glimmering.

The day did not, as usual, terminate the intolerable conclaves of the wolves. I could hear them in the thickets, in gullies, on hillsides, howling their harsh and prolonged invitation to the feast.

Seated beside the corpse, whose eyes I had just closed with trembling fingers, I decided I must free myself of it, I must escape from the dream of yesterday into the reality of the present. It was evident that so long as the wolves could smell its odor, however faint that odor might be—absolutely imperceptible to the human nose—they would follow me in packs. Perhaps they would attack me. Per-

haps they would attack my dogs. And the death of my huskies would decidedly diminish my own chance of living. I counted my cartridges. I counted those I had inherited from Paul. Probably I still had enough. But it would be hardly possible to rout a pack of attacking wolves by firing twenty or thirty shots at a time. For this reason the cartridges were well-nigh worthless. Poor Paul! And how would I ever tell Maggie? But no, I must now think of the wolves.

The idea then occurred to me of wrapping the corpse in one of its blankets and making a coffin of ice for it. All I would have to do would be to melt enough snow. But it is astonishing how little water a pan full of snow produces. As soon as the snow had melted I had to add more to the lukewarm water. This occupation diverted my mind from all my mournful ideas. As soon as I had a pan full of water I drenched the corpse with it. It was an all day task, and not until evening descended did I consider the icy covering sufficiently thick to prevent all odor of the corpse from reaching the wolves. Nevertheless while I manufactured a rough kind of sled from small logs of split birch, they continued to howl and they kept it up all that night. But I detected a note of uncertainty in their voices. During the previous twenty-four hours I had

studied the language of the wolves so closely that I was beginning to understand it.

I waited for daylight to come before leaving the woods where I had taken shelter. I skirted the edge of the forest which lay to the west, even though I knew that in doing so I would lengthen my journey considerably. But I also realized the risk of venturing out on the vast plain of snow. But the corpse imposed its will upon mine. Not even the danger of death prevented me from yielding to the will of this now nameless thing for which the wolves lusted.

I harnessed myself to the sled I had made and with the two teams of huskies dragging their sleds behind me philosophically, we pressed along. The straps of my harness cut into my chest, and robbed me of a good quarter of my lung capacity. Just as the corpse burdened my will, it burdened my shoulders, my chest, my back, and my thighs. It was my master, as I was the master of the dogs.

In the distance, wolves provided me with an escort. If they had come close I could not have resisted the temptation of killing a few with well-aimed shots. "Perhaps," I said to myself, "that might pacify the others." But doubtless because they were no longer certain that they were near a corpse they prudently kept their distance. I could see them

gracefully trotting past one another, shuffling along, standing with one paw raised, or sitting on their haunches like dogs. (I could even imagine that they tipped their heads on one side with their ears erect.) Then they would disappear behind a snowdrift and reappear a half-mile farther on. Occasionally one of them, being more insolent than his brothers, would sit down at sixty paces from me. Then I would halt and take up one of the loaded rifles which lay on the body of the corpse. But when I was ready to fire, the wolf would flee and I would decide not to take chances with my precious cartridges on a moving target.

I pushed on, forever on the watch, my nights passed with hardly any sleep. This corpse that had fastened itself upon me was sapping my life's blood. I could feel myself, I could even see myself, becoming thin and drawn. That I was losing weight was, alas, all too true. My snow-shoes sank less deeply into the snow which meant that the sleds followed in a softer track. But something worse than that was that the paws of the huskies began to chap. When I had set up camp for the night I would extract some of the grease from the pemmican. I would soften it a little by rolling it between my palms. When the fat had become malleable I

would rub it on the paws of the growling dogs who would meanwhile attempt to bite me. Then they would lick off the fat and at the same time lick their blistered paws.

Though I had shaken off the wolves I had also removed myself from any supply of wood. I had to hunt everywhere for the slightest trace of vegetation and burrow into the snow for a dwarf shrub that would hardly yield enough heat to make tea. My supply of meat was disappearing at an alarming rate. I had to go on short rations of pemmican, I who required the food of two ordinary men. The slightest exertions made me sweat, made my heart beat frightfully, and covered my eyes with a wavering film. I realized the extent of my exhaustion and knew that I was burning up the tissues of my body with desperate rapidity, for my strides that had formerly been swift and long, were now becoming extremely short. I could realize my nervous exhaustion, too, for the slightest noise sent shudders through me and cold waves would sweep over my blood raising imaginary hair on my spine (a relic of prehistoric ancestors).

To save my life I was many times tempted to abandon the corpse. But the corpse would not permit me (I thought so at least) and each morning it would insistently remind me of my duty toward it.

I came to hate it, this too obdurate taskmaster, who wished to kill me in order to bear it company. I cursed it and with such violent abuse that the huskies themselves would cower in terror. I restrained myself with difficulty from kicking and beating its icy flanks.

The day came when all the food was exhausted. I opened the dead man's knapsack and boiled the moccasins I found there. This vile soup supplied me with energy enough to carry me twenty more miles.

The huskies eyed each other hungrily. If my whip were not always ready they would have hurled themselves at one another and some would have been devoured. The second dog, a sly traitor, bit the leader! Doubtless he hoped that I would be obliged to shoot the wounded animal and thus supply the other dogs with food. Whip in hand, I interceded. I unharnessed the leader to give him a last chance in a struggle against death. He was a faithful old husky who had made three expeditions with me before and I knew that if there was any possibility of his coming through alive he would take advantage of it. Eyes blood-shot, hair ruffled, half-mad he trotted along at one side of the team. But the load had become heavy for the rest.

I should have abandoned half the furs. The dead man's share, naturally. But the corpse commanded me to keep them until the very end for Maggie and I could not bring myself to abandon any of mine. So two teams of bony huskies had to suffer just as I was suffering.

Under these circumstances sleep would have condemned me to death. Perhaps even my dogs might fall upon and devour me. What was I to do? On, on, on. On until I found something I could kill. Not until I dropped would I kill a dog.

I pushed on, hate and despair consuming my heart. A fierce hunger gnawed at my bowels. My stomach seemed to have shrivelled like dry leather. A constant fog before my eyes made day as dark as night.

Though I had toiled on for sixty hours I had not covered fifteen miles. I was worn out from continually being on the lookout for provender of some sort. Finally my dogs, utterly exhausted before I was, lay down in the snow. Leaving the corpse behind I walked toward a snowdrift a few hundred paces away. At its crest I thought I could distinguish a little bare earth. It must have taken me more than an hour to reach it.

It was hardly more than a few feet higher than the surrounding plain. But its height was sufficient

for me to see, even before I had reached the highest point, what might prove to be my salvation: hardly three miles away was a forest! I could certainly find game there.

Taking my deliverance from danger as something already at hand I decided to grant myself the luxury of a moment's rest. But I would allow myself only five minutes, not more. With a sigh of relief I took off my snow-shoes and stretched out on the snow so that the drift would protect me from the wind. But before relaxing completely I felt a desire to look around me again. As I raised my head I beheld on the other side of the banked snow, and just twenty paces away, a wolf calmly trotting along. He had not yet detected my presence.

Ordinarily he would have been an easy target. He was not moving rapidly. But in this case I felt I must have every chance on my side. After moistening my lips with the tip of my tongue I whistled softly to imitate the sound of a rodent. As I had expected, the wolf halted to investigate the sound and see if it meant food. I made a prodigious effort to keep from trembling, took aim, and fired. The recoil shook me violently. "God, how weak I am," I thought. "And I must have missed, too."

At first I was afraid to look, certain that I could not possibly hit him if I were obliged to shoot him

on the run. By another effort of will I raised my head and I saw that I had aimed true. I quickly put on my snow-shoes, no longer feeling my fatigue. It was as if the life of the wolf had entered me. He was dead, stone dead. I drank the blood that poured from the wound, blood mixed with hair and shattered bones. Then I ate some of the blood-soaked snow. I slit his carcass open and devoured everything, even his warm liver. It had a strong odor, in fact the strong flavor of the meat would have repelled me at any other time. But hunger had transformed it into delicious food.

It was now my task to carry the remains to my dogs and to give them this strength Death had bequeathed us. It was a difficult task. For a man who is nine-tenths exhausted from cold, hunger, fatigue, and lack of sleep can hardly carry even a very thin wolf on his back. But it was my will which succeeded in doing it, not I.

My huskies and I became living beings again when we had eaten and we were able to traverse the distance between us and the woods in less than two hours. Once there I promptly lighted a fire of dry wood to make myself tea. And when I had drunk it, fortune again favored me. For a little to the north I heard a moose crashing his way through the underbrush. He paused to eat something, and

then a moment later the sound of rustling branches began again.

I succeeded in shooting the animal, then I returned to the huskies and the corpse. I pitched camp near the slaughtered moose and tied every dog to a tree with a pile of meat before him. I broiled and ate some of the meat myself and finally wrapping myself in furs I crawled into a comfortable bed I had hollowed out in the snow. A large fire blazed beside me. From time to time I would wake up and like a savage would throw more dry wood onto the fire, which would then leap up brightly.

By passing my hand over my bearded face I could tell how much flesh I had lost. Although the first moose had yielded me an abundance of meat, I set out the next day to shoot another, simply as a matter of precaution. I achieved my purpose and after I had cut away the choice pieces I let the dogs have the remainder.

Reassured now concerning the immediate future, I decided to remain several days where I was and not to proceed on my way until I had entirely recovered my strength.

The dead continued to impose its will upon me, but now it did so under the guise of seduction. "We will be brothers-in-law," he had said to me. And

he had pushed Hannah into my arms. All this was in accord with my magnificent desire to live. Tired and half-mad from my lack of strength, I needed someone to help me. My strength must be doubled by joining it to another person's vitality. So Hannah came and took my hand. Her blond hair was done up as it always was and she wore a large bow of black silk at the back of her neck. She brought me her love, but she also brought me the germs of hatred. To love her was simple; but I must also hate Archer who now appeared before me with his fiery hair, sitting beside her on the fence. I remembered all her eyes had told me when her lips had spoken nothing.

She helped me broil the slices of moose meat; she helped me arrange the furs for my bed; and when I lay down to sleep she placed herself beside me to sleep with me, her head resting on my shoulder. I told her stories as if she were a child. I taught her how to pet my dogs without danger of their biting her. She suggested that I cut my beard, bristling around my lips with icicles. She buttoned my fur-lined Mackinaw around my neck. For her sake I threw extra wood upon the fire. She recompensed me for my care and thoughtfulness by helping me win this hard struggle against weariness and cold. I had only to run my hands along my legs and feel

the rebuilt tissues there to realize what she had done for me and what I owed her. And the dead kept his watch over us.

Thanks to this unexpected help I was able to resume my journey. Should I go toward the southwest? Or toward the west? In that direction the land seemed to rise which led me to believe that I was in the basin of Hudson Bay. But how far had I deviated toward the east? I was in a country that was completely unknown to me. By proceeding directly south I knew that I would find human habitations of some kind, but I wanted to return through Edmonton. I knew the fur market there and I also was sure my dogs and furs would bring a better price there than elsewhere.

It struck me as being extremely likely that the rest of the journey would be less painful. After smearing charcoal around my eyes (I did not intend to go blind again) I could safely enjoy the fantastic pirouettes of light on the ice crystals that hung suspended in the air around and above me. Or I could watch the glittering and microscopic hexagons of snow crystals. The transparent facets of these innumerable prisms broke up the light, held it, refracted it. I understood the reason for it, but science seemed out of place. I discarded it as I would an article of old clothing. Instead I imagined a fairy

ballet, danced for my own pleasure. . . . Pardon me! For *our* pleasure! It was a marvelous gift the sun and winter jointly offered us in honor of our nuptials. Absurdly but naturally, it seemed proper for nature, as never before, to go to such pains for me. It was a gift of chased silver, studded with topazes, emeralds, sapphires, rubies, and amethysts. And pearls! The orient of the Thousand and One Nights had never held more treasure than his Omnipotence the North squandered in a few moments from his inexhaustible treasures. His Majesty the Winter and His Highness the Sun placed their signatures upon my marriage contract.

The blood of a strong young man again coursed through my veins. The three or four pounds of meat which I ate every day had restored my vitality to such an extent that my mind became alert again. Just as strength flowed through my legs, my shoulders, my arms, so did imagination flood my heart and my brain. Was I dragging the corpse or was it pushing me? Though it had seemed to weigh tons before, it now seemed to be without weight, imponderable. Because I had obeyed its will it now seemed to repay me for my efforts.

At the same time the feeling of Death, in so far as it concerned me, had entirely disappeared. I had never felt it vividly. I could understand that

other men might be forced to abandon the mute pile of their bleached bones upon the icy wastes, but I, never! For I, at least I believed so, was born to victory and the supreme victory is to survive. Like a God I was filled with the idea of immortality. In spite of the fact that I dragged a corpse behind me, the words Death, Age, Decay seemed empty of meaning. They moved above me as distant and as intangible as the planets. The life which flooded my whole being was enough to assure me that I had brought something new into the world, a redemption that a miserable humanity had been hoping for ever since the beginning. Victory over the Destruction of the body. Paul was dead. But not I!

After having shot another moose and having feasted over its carcass with my dogs, ideas began to form in my mind.

It seemed to me that Paul, that piteous thing I dragged behind me, belonged essentially to the defeated. Defeated not only by Death, but by Love. He was dead and would never marry Maggie. Thus he failed in achieving his two greatest desires. It was difficult to decide which had caused the other. Had he died because he had made an effort beyond his strength to assure the possession of the woman he loved? Had he lost this woman because he was

dead? For my part I had won my game with death and therefore I would win my game with Woman. I would marry Hannah. While Paul, the defeated, would pass into oblivion.

This exuberance of living now manifested itself in another form. As my heart became firm in its love for Hannah, it also swelled in hatred for Archer.

Why should I not vanquish him since I had defeated Death?

I remember that the weather about this time had become almost warm. I had lost all track of time, but I think it must have been toward the middle of March. A gentle but steady south wind made the snow glisten like a precious metal.

Though my strength had completely returned, the warm weather had made the snow heavier to trek through. I was thus painfully dragging along my burden when, as I passed around the edge of a snowdrift, I beheld a solitary figure approaching me from the left. I immediately halted and sat down on the corpse. By so doing I placed myself within arm's reach of my rifle. In these waste lands a chance meeting may always bring danger with it. It is for this reason that a long silence always follows the first words of greeting. It is not discourtesy; it is precaution. How much of what a stranger tells you

can you believe? But his general appearance, his equipment, his load, the tracks his sleds make, all these tell you things that he may not care to express himself. And there is also the way he looks at you: straight into your eyes, shiftily, or from one side.

The man who was approaching me had no dogs, no weapon, no sled. A small knapsack was loosely strapped to his shoulders. His snow-shoes slipped past each other in a regular rhythm. He showed no sign of either hurry or defiance. He was not a lost traveler. I decided he was a man who knew the land there well.

Although it was evident that he was of pure white blood, he greeted me in the Cree dialect. I replied in the same language, whereupon he sat down beside me. Then pulling out a plug of tobacco and a knife from his coat pocket, he offered them to me. While I fumbled for my pipe, I noticed that he glanced with a knowing eye at my huskies who were lying down and lapping the snow.

I had filled my pipe, when he suddenly showed signs of interest in the object, quite obviously inexplicable to him, on which we were resting side by side. He asked me what this long cylinder of ice lashed to a prospector's sledge could possibly be. Until that moment I had not thought about it.

But suddenly I realized how disrespectful it was to use a corpse as a chair. Rising, I explained.

"The body of my partner, dead from cold and exhaustion. I am taking it home."

The stranger shuddered, but not from cold. However, he recovered in a moment. He rose slowly and removing his otter-skin cap, he revealed a fine head with a high brow. I noted there was unusual depth to his eyes.

He solemnly made the sign of the cross and in a clear voice uttered the words:

"De profundis clamavi ad te Domine!"

When I responded "Amen" and also made the sign of the cross—how many lost memories clamored within me!—he said in French:

"You are a Catholic?"

I replied that I was.

"And he?"

"Also a Catholic, Father."

(What else could he have been, this man who was traveling through this Kingdom of Desolation with such majestic tranquillity and who recited the psalm for the dead with such a scholarly accent?)

"Moreover," I continued, "he expressed the hope of being buried in sanctified ground. That is why I have been dragging this burden for weeks over the snow."

"My poor child!"

That was all he said. He thought a moment; a very brief moment. He, too, was a man of few words. He was one of those missionaries whose minds, clear and determined, turn to action as a means of realizing the dreams that motivate their lives. Tossing his knapsack on the first sled, he harnessed himself to the corpse and said:

"Let's be off. Straight on, now, toward the west if we don't wish to lose our way."

I tried to take the load from him. But no!

"Come! Come! Don't bother me. You've already paid something toward your indulgence." (He smiled.) "I suppose you know that services rendered to the dead are works of repentance. Later when the day of reckoning comes, your act will serve you well with God. So many less years in Purgatory for you. And now let the Priest do the work alone."

I bowed. All he would permit me to do, and only after much insistence on my part, was to break the trail. Constantly he had to re-direct me. His mind seemed to be a compass.

He dragged the load along at a rapid pace. One of the finest of all Canadian types, he was a son of the French Provinces in the West, a true Norman with a huge, muscular body. I flatter myself that I am as strong and have more endurance than most

men. (I had just proved this fact to myself.) But what was I in comparison to a man who, in spite of a heavy sledge-load, could maintain an animated, lively and intelligent conversation as we hurried along? He would pass from the purest French to the dialect of half-breeds, or tell a picturesque anecdote filled with words from Cree, Chippewa, or Sauteux, words chosen skilfully to fire the imagination and make his thoughts more vivid to the one who listened.

Picture two cabins of hewn logs at the edge of a forest. They were the church and the rectory. A small enclosure lying deep in snow evidently was a vegetable garden. A brook with steep banks flowed under the forest of pine, fir and spruce, which composed a background of deep blue and light gray for the two cabins. Though I described the brook as flowing, you can easily understand that it flowed only in summer time. The afternoon when we arrived it had not yet awakened from its long winter's sleep and it still shivered—you could almost hear it turning in its sleep and cracking the ice—under its bluish blanket of snow.

The dogs of the rectory began barking and our dogs replied. Then a door opened, sending forth a challenge to the cold in the form of silvery steam

and Jean Baptiste, an old half-breed, appeared on the threshold gesticulating.

"Ah Fader! Don' you know some tam you leave your bones behin' on a treep lak dis. Is it moche sense for a man lak you, even dough no wan's more strong, to go mushin' troo de snow in ev'ry kin' of wedder?"

The rectory contained only one room and was more than primitive. Father Laroyale, a lay monk of Marie Immaculée, cooked his own food with the assistance of Jean Baptiste. Jean Baptiste pared the potatoes (planted and dug in the fall by the missionary and his companion) while Father Laroyale baked the bread—that is to say, when he had flour. After supper he would deliver a long prayer to which the half-breed would make the responses, then the two men would unroll their blankets and go to bed, magnificently miserable, on the hard dirt floor.

He was now returning from a four days' trip to baptize some Indians who were dying of smallpox twenty-five miles away. To spare his dogs the priest had traveled the distance on snow-shoes, carrying his sacred treasures and a little food in a knapsack strapped to his back.

I learned that he had frozen a toe the winter previous. Jean Baptiste had amputated it with an old

razor, while the patient, his teeth clenched, told his beads without uttering a single groan or complaint. At present his mutilated foot did not prevent him from using snow-shoes.

The little church was as cold inside as the air was outdoors, so there was no danger of the corpse thawing. In spite of his long and arduous journey the missionary insisted upon holding the wake over the corpse alone. He told us that he was the boss in his own house and anyway, we would have our share of suffering by sleeping on the ground. (He said this with a little childlike smile.)

When I finally woke up after a long sleep and had breakfasted on boiled potatoes, venison and bread (I had forgotten how bread tasted) I saw how Jean Baptiste had passed the night. Huge blocks of frozen soil showed with what difficulty he had dug a grave with an axe.

In the little rustic church where the altar stone rested on rough hand-hewn logs, a stove roared. Clad in a tanned elkskin suit adorned with faded embroidery and with fringes along the arms and shoulders, Jean Baptiste, whose straight black hair framed a dark face with slanting eyes, was a fantastic altar boy. The face of the missionary gleamed with mystic pallor above his black robes. Heavy with sleep his eyes glowed with a deep fire. The

prayers of the Catholic burial service rose and fell in the humble chapel. They seemed to extend its walls until they burst in a magnificent flight toward the Infinite. So was Paul Durand's dying wish to be buried in holy ground fulfilled.

After a rapid trek of six hours Jean Baptiste led me to a beaten trail which he told me should make it possible to reach Athabaska Landing in three days' time.

I was again a solitary traveler.

But henceforth my trip was without particular interest. I tried in vain to remember my departure along the banks of the Athabaska with a companion whose face now resisted all attempts to resurrect it. I remembered that we had shifted our direction to the northeast because one evening over our camp fire an old Indian wrapped in a striped blanket had told us that his brothers, deeply in debt to the Hudson Bay Company, would be glad to deal with private traders.

Athabaska Landing, situated on the steep banks of the river, was a town of a few cabins and a mission house. A Yankee land prospector with a hooked nose and shrewd eyes was busy buying up property.

"There's oil here," he informed me. "All along

this river, you can see it oozing out of the ground. You yourself have probably burnt natural gas for fuel. And what do you think of this bituminous sand? I'm buying up all the land around here and I'm going to portion it off. As soon as they build the railroad up this far I'll be in clover."

He took photograph after photograph with his kodak in order to have visual proofs of his promises. I was well acquainted with his sales methods. I could imagine Hugh Latimer ambuscaded behind columns of publicity, filling innumerable newspapers with pictures to tempt those who longed to get rich quickly. At Winnipeg, Brandon, Regina, Moose Jaw, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Edmonton, Prince Albert and Saskatoon shop windows would display maps whereon were marked in red ink all the possible railroad lines converging on that section which one could reach at present only by means of dog trains, horseback, or by boat. A blue print would show the division into lots. Persuasive salesmen would collar every stranger who had been attracted by the bait. They would lead their victim into land-offices where an orator leaning back in his swivel chair and with all the documents before him would then prove what a sound, money-making investment it was. His oration would produce a sale whereby the buyer would one day, he would be in-

formed, reap a huge profit. But the sale would also afford Hugh Latimer and his commission men a large return for his audacity as a capitalist and for their imagination as salesmen.

At Edmonton I experienced some difficulty in disposing of my furs. I was informed by the dealers with whom I usually traded that I had arrived too late. They had too large a stock of furs already. There was really nothing doing; the market was glutted. However, to oblige me. . . . But, great heavens! Not at the price I asked! Not at that price!

Such were the words of Josiah Briggs, a man with horn-rimmed spectacles who sat with his feet on a roll top desk. His happy face, glowing with alcohol, assumed an expression of genuine sadness when he offered me a truly ridiculous price. MacMurray, his partner, gaunt, solemn and sententious, came into the office and confirmed Mr. Briggs' remarks. To believe him, all the ladies throughout the entire world were overcome with pity for the poor animals in the North and were refusing to wear furs any more.

"It's no longer the style to wear them, Monsieur Monge. The fashion for them has passed. It's really very sad indeed. But have a cigar, Monsieur Monge.

As Job said, 'Can that which hath no savour be eaten without salt?' "

And he sank back into his chair with a gesture of defeat.

To tell the truth I was used to this play-acting. But they had never pushed it quite so far. I really believed, after listening to them, that fashions had suffered a serious change and telling the two gentlemen that I would consider their offer, I bade them good-bye.

Strolling through the streets I suddenly beheld the profile of my huge friend, Angus Shawn the policeman. His six feet six lost all its majesty when he saw me. He was beside himself with pleasure. His affection for me had begun some years before. He had one evening torn me from the passionate embraces of a lamp-post (I was then in no condition to know who had started it, the lamp-post or I). Having decided that these demonstrations of affection were absolutely improper, Officer Shawn had intervened. But I had given him the address of a high class hotel and he at once began treating me with respect. He had escorted me there himself in a hired sleigh. A box of Henry Clay cigars that I sent him a few days later served to ennoble me in his eyes.

"And how's every little thing at Edmonton?" I asked. "Rather bad, I hear."

"Bless me, no. Never in all my life have I arrested more drunks and disorderlies than I have during the last fifteen or twenty days. And every one of them had his pockets bulging with money. There's no doubt about it, the price of furs has never been so high."

After treating Officer Shawn to a shot or two of whiskey and soda I took leave of him and glanced into several shop windows. It did not strike me that the pessimism of Briggs and MacMurray was at all justified. Fur coats of mink, silver fox, martin, seal, and otter, were all selling at very fancy prices, even though it was the end of winter and the period of spring sales.

I returned to Briggs and MacMurray. When I opened the door their faces were wreathed in smiles. But as soon as they recognized me they both assumed the most lugubrious expressions. MacMurray was superb. Briggs, however, did not quite succeed in fashioning his face into lines of sorrow for nothing could have concealed that high color of pink clay (slightly crackled) which a combination of whiskey and cigars had given his complexion. I at once began my attack. I remarked that I was merely returning to say good-bye. I was taking my

furs to Winnipeg to sell them there, or, if I found it necessary I would take them to Saint Louis. Consternation at once transfigured their faces. I mean that their faces assumed a slight appearance of reality. MacMurray hastily offered me cigars, while Briggs, his face growing as round as a sphere of Edam cheese, said:

"Let's see. Let's see about this, Monsieur Monge. Mebbe we can come to some agreement after all. Rather than lose an old friend we might make a sacrifice or two. Wouldn't we, MacMurray? We'd make a sacrifice or two, sure we would. Let's see now, what d'ye say to the prices we gave last year?"

"Nothing doing."

At this remark MacMurray let fly with a biblical quotation whose bearing on the matter in hand still escapes me. Moving his cigar from the left corner of his mouth to the right, he grinned pleasantly and sighed:

"Monsieur Monge, you really ain't reasonable. How much do you want for them furs?"

I made my price and it was as if I had pressed an electric button. Two hands rose to scratch two noses and the two partners stared at each other. Briggs rose and again went out to glance over my load of furs in the room where I had stored them (after receiving a receipt). Then he returned, smiled, filled out a check and handed it to me. I made them

out a bill of sale and when they had locked it carefully in their safe they at once became gay and expansive. For them it had evidently been a good bargain.

Usually my stay at Edmonton was a real return to civilization. Understand thereby that I went on a brief but savage drunk. I drank alcohol as a form of medicine (at least that is the excuse I gave myself). I imagined that it completed the ablutions of the bath wherein I had washed the dirt from my filthy hide. For alcohol cleansed my soul as a fur trader of the Great North. The next day the after-effects usually left me with such recollections, that for months afterwards I could hardly look at alcohol. And that was an excellent thing, too.

This time I had hardly tasted the damnable stuff when I began to wonder how Hannah would receive a drunken husband. If she used the handle of a broom she wouldn't have been entirely unjustified. However, I did not forget that she was used to seeing her father return home slightly fuddled, filling the room with the stench of alcohol while old Mrs. O'Molloy took God to witness that all men were just alike, that is to say, not worth a farthing. Archer, rising to the defense of the sleeping O'Molloy, would remark that "the very best of men is no more than a man."

Even the cheap theaters where one can always amuse oneself with a girl who is a bit too gay did not attract me. I experienced no pleasure in recalling my parties with Betsey (who was a blonde), with Patricia (who resembled a bad copy of Romney), with Solveig the Norwegian (with the bearing of a Walkyrie), with laughing Gretchen (forever sentimental), with Julia (who sang me Parisian songs she had learned from the victrola), with Jean who was born in Chicago and boasted of beating all the world's records by having had twenty-seven fiances, of whom eleven had committed suicide for love of her.

No! Absolutely no! At Edmonton I would not give myself over to the secret or open, forbidden or permitted pleasures the city offered. There Civilization and Barbarism stood face to face under a veil of hypocrisy that cloaked, as it did elsewhere, the last word in clandestine vice and outward morality.

Betsey, Patricia, Solveig, Gretchen, Julia and Jean all together did not succeed in effacing Hannah's image, the only one I carried out of the great North, the one whose reality in flesh I was to see in three days.

I remembered a magnificent passage from old Timeus: "My eyes are no longer filled with lewd creatures, but with a virgin."

CHAPTER SIX

Home Coming

IN a dawn like a Japanese print, the train dropped me off at a deserted station platform. Houses and woods seemed to be done in a wash of Chinese ink, framed by a line of dark green, under a clear sky. To the east betwen a fringe of trees and the sky, a firm but delicate brush had with a single line drawn that strip of yellow which was to expand into day.

I loaded my light luggage onto my shoulders—a few personal effects rolled up in a blanket—and taking my rifle in my hand I started on the road toward home. It would have been of little use to have sent a notification of my return to the Bretons who had agreed to live in Paul's house and to take care of our live stock during our absence. There was only the slightest chance that they would have received a letter in time, for they very rarely went to town for their mail.

As the distance home was about eight miles, two

hours at my usual rapid pace brought me to my destination.

The weather was extremely pleasant. Spring was bursting forth everywhere. It seemed as if the earth were too narrow to contain it all. In mobile triangles, geese uttering their discordant cries sped northward in their search for a perpetual spring. Red-throated thrushes fought over the possession of a bush. A skunk, its back striped with white, trotted along my path. In three bounds a wolf leaped across the highway.

Farms began awakening. Dogs barked. The sound of cowbells drifted toward me. Calves bleated for their mothers. Between the trees and a sky that was turning from green to pale blue, some smoke the color of swan's-down spiralled slowly in the breeze.

As I passed a field cut up and fenced in squares, as if to clumsily repair the mutilation of the plough, I would recall the name of its owner. This white bungalow with its yellow verandah was Mason's farm, Rich Mason as he was called. Coming over from Ontario with plenty of money he had cleared not only the 160 acres of his homestead, but three-quarters of an adjoining section which he had taken in the name of his sons. He had already done his spring ploughing and four hundred acres of harrowed land lay under the delicate pink and silver

mists of morning. At the far end of the land, prairie fowl soared over a field of pink-brown stubble.

Pale in the morning light a large house of hewn timber, whose shingles had taken on the hue of slate, was that of Laflèche, the Canadian. In the tidy front yard, one of Laflèche's sons whom I recognized by his stature was pumping water, while his brother, no less a giant, was watering four enormous horses. I watched a girl skip lightly over puddles of water with shining milk pails in her hands.

Then I recalled that I must make a turn to the east at right angles to the road. The road now became rougher, for the township had not sufficient credit to repair all the roads of this newly settled district. I had to crawl through a barbed wire fence at the risk of tearing the new suit I had bought at Edmonton, in order to avoid a reed framed pool that crossed the highway. A pair of wild ducks, uttering cries of warning, soared up from the pool. Their flight carried them a few hundred feet where they settled down upon a little pond. The blue of the sky deepened.

Clumps of willow were budding and their brown branches were sprinkled with an almond green powder of nascent foliage. The pembinas were loaded with clusters of white stars. The dogwood trees were covered with cream colored flowers and

the aspens were beginning to put forth their downy leaves. I was far away from the bleak prairies of snow. How many days from them? Hardly eight. Impossible! But it was true.

I entered the section owned by the Scotch clan. Campbell, Grant, and MacPherson had cleared three adjoining fields, lending one another their help, but at a high rate of interest. I owed this remark to Archer and I suddenly remembered his red hair and Irish face. My thoughts split into two parts and took two different directions. I was passing along the fields of the Scotchmen and at the same time I thought of the Irish. No! This morning I would not take the turn toward the O'Molloys! Hannah! Yes, Hannah! But how could I ever break the terrible news to Maggie? This problem so absorbed my mind that twice I went blundering into puddles.

I turned off the main road, leaving the farms of the Scotchmen behind me to the south. Each with four horses hitched to his planter, Grant, Campbell and MacPherson planted the precious wheat in the well-prepared soil. Georgics I left behind me for my wild bucolics. From now on my road, lined with ruts and full of treacherous mud holes, wound through the woods like a snake, skirted a little swamp, twisted and untwisted past trees, and

afforded all manner of unexpected sights, such as a pheasant with his tail spread, or a hurrying ermine drunk with blood, or the fleeting vision of a wild hare, the flight of a blue jay, or the rat-tat-tat of a woodpecker attacking the worm-eaten trunk of a tree, or . . . But how the devil was I to break the news to Maggie?

I arrived at Paul Durand's home at about ten o'clock. It was there the Bretons who cared for our live stock during the winter had lived.

Faithful to her native head-dress and her wooden shoes, surrounded by four children and evidently about to bear a fifth (who would be as dirty as his little brothers and sisters) Madame La Floch shaded her eyes with her hand to make out who I was.

When I told her my name she exclaimed with astonishment:

"Ma Doué! Dear Jesus. Ma Doué! And so it's you. Indeed it is! Ma Doué! And where is the other monsieur? Ma Doué! And there's Jean Marie who's hired himself out to the Englishmen, the Masons as they call them. Ma Doué! But it's Saturday and he'll certainly be home by nightfall. Ma Doué! Dear Jesus! Ma Doué!"

I told her Paul Durand had died in the North. She shook her head. Shocks of yellow hair fell over

her blue eyes. They were pretty and childlike in a melancholy way.

"Ma Doué! And Jean Marie was right at that. Didn't he say it was indeed tempting the devil to go up into that country? Ma Doué! It's a good thing for me that he'll be back here tonight. Never again will I dare sleep here alone. So poor Monsieur Durand is dead! Just like that! Dear Jesus! And his ghost will probably haunt this place at night."

I tried to explain to her that since Paul Durand had been dead for more than two months and during that time had not considered it necessary to return, there was very slight probability that he would begin returning now.

"Perhaps. Perhaps. The poor soul! But you can't be sure of it. Now that you've returned who knows but he might have returned with you. Ghosts only appear round about midnight. There was my grandfather whose ghost wandered over the moors near Ploermel."

She then began telling a long-winded story of ghosts and spectres but I cut her short. Changing her tone, she said:

"But have you had anything to eat yet? Jean Marie would certainly give me a scolding for not offering you milk, bread and eggs. Ma Doué! How could I let you go without giving you anything to

eat when there's so much food in the house. Come in, Monsieur."

How little time had the La Floch family required to transform the neat and spotless cabin of Paul Durand into that dirty, sordid, and irrevocably filthy shack which I now beheld? Had only five months and a half been enough? Children's finger marks stained the walls. The window panes were almost opaque with grease and smoke. The table looked like a map of an unknown world. The floor was strewn with filth and rubbish. But the odor beat everything. To create its equal I would have to combine the stench of Chippewa tents—the only Indians who are really dirty—with the smell of Eskimo huts. Even if I added the smell of the huts of Icelandic fishermen on Lake Winnipeg I might fail to produce something that was quite as bad. Thanks to Brittany, France had broken another record. It was sheer heroism on my part to respond to the cordial hospitality of the woman with a semblance of hunger. I heroically gulped down some milk soup. I heroically swallowed some griddle cakes. I heroically got down everything placed before me. I would rather not describe the way my gorge rose and fell. And I would rather eradicate from my memory that other heroism, the kiss I

was obliged to vouchsafe to each child in turn. But the fresh air outdoors restored me.

I examined the live stock. They were all in good health. Marie Jannik showed me the calf that had been born that winter. She gave me an exact reckoning of the poultry. She informed me that three hens had died and she displayed their remains to prove it. I had again to hold my nose. A few hens were already setting. Thank God, Breton honesty also broke a record.

Not far from my house I came upon my saddle horse grazing in the tender, new grass. All around him were puddles of water, reflecting the sky and trees. The air rang with the cries of plover. Busy flocks of these birds hurried hither and thither on delicate legs. They were not frightened by me, but wild ducks rose from all sides when I appeared from behind a clump of dwarf willow. I called to my pony and he pricked up his ears. At my second call he evidently recognized me, for galloping through the puddles, to the great alarm of the plovers, he hastened toward me. He sniffed my hand before permitting me to pat him, then when I began scratching him behind the ear, he thrust his nose under my arm and trembled with pleasure. He did not seem to yearn for the Prairie (the dead Prairie).

Moreover he seemed plump and sleek. But he had too heavy a layer of fat on his belly and I promised myself that I would soon exercise it off.

It is difficult to imagine how good it feels to sink into one's armchair after being so long and so far away from it. It seemed to recognize me as if it were an animate creature. I stretched out in it for a moment or two, striving to imagine how I should break the news to Maggie. But as every way I could think of seemed awkward, I reached out and took down a book from the case. Reading also seemed good after so many months of savagery.

The book took my mind off my principal worry, that of breaking the news. To help me in my attempts to forget about it, I even abstained from thinking about Hannah. However, she occupied so great a proportion of my thoughts that she suddenly appeared to me. Today was Sunday. I would go to see her tomorrow afternoon. Would she be content to live in my house? Obviously it was too small. The house proper included a small kitchen and a large room that was both bedroom and study. I would transform this latter room into a kitchen by covering the floors and walls with linoleum, thereby making it easier to clean. I would build a small addition of two stories. The first floor, a large room, I would furnish with leather armchairs

similar to the one I now sat in, with a rocking chair, for I remembered Hannah's liking for them, and a table. I would enlarge my library. I would order more books from France. English literature offered me an abundant diversion. Yes. I must not forget a piano. Hannah would certainly like to have one, even though she did not know how to play. I must agree to having a phonograph, but I would try to reform her taste there. Upstairs we would have a bedroom and bath. That would be a rare luxury for a farmhouse, even though in the smallest towns no American or Canadian citizen ever fails to have a bath room. And what else would we have? Ah yes, an elegant buggy with a strapping pair of horses. I remembered two bays that I had matched, each one having a white ring on three legs. "Three rings is the horse for kings." I pictured us with our yellow hair seated side by side in the buggy. Then I pictured ourselves far in the future with silvery hair, but still side by side. In all my dreams I did not believe I reached that touching and ridiculous degree of folly I had accused poor Paul of reaching when he had talked about Maggie to me.

And Maggie? What would I do about her? Would she collapse in tears on her sister's shoulder? Or in mute and inconsolable grief would she hide herself away? Would she pour forth her hate upon

me for having tempted Paul into taking the fatal trip? She would see me arrive alone, downcast, and she would understand. Then, bravely, using the old time-honored remarks I would say, "My poor girl, your sorrow is great but at your age you still have all your life ahead of you. Be brave!" I would plead with her not to despair. I knew she would refuse all consolation. But time would have its effect. Would she go into mourning?

I passed Sunday morning scrubbing the floors. Scrubbing floors was my most vivid memory of the military training I had undergone at the camp in Toul some years before. A soldier for only a year, treated scornfully as a mere rooky by the old timers, I had scrubbed and polished oak floors under the sarcastic eye of peasants who smoked their pipes and emptied quarts of acrid, red wine as they sat astride their cots. My mind returned to those grim days. Once again I saw the sergeant for whom the task of training the "defenders of their country" had resolved itself into a litany of foul abuse. It was important that I be a good shot, tireless in long marches, and capable of rising rapidly in the ranks. The more important fact, however, was that the floors be scrubbed well so that the sergeant might receive praise from the second lieutenant, the second

lieutenant from the first, and the first lieutenant from the captain. Without being able to attach names to their faces I once again saw the profiles and the idiosyncrasies of the various "rungs in the military ladder." All of it appeared very distant. But I had learned to wield a broom and a mop. Then my thoughts naturally returned to Hannah who would preside over these household duties. And thoughts of Hannah led me to thoughts of Maggie. My apprehensions increased.

At four hundred or so paces from the O'Molloy farm I heard the sound of a violin and cries of merriment. Were they dancing? I became worried. For a moment I thought of turning back. But no. A burst of gaiety issuing through the door and open windows plunged me into despair.

As I arrived at the house the music ceased. Archer and Hannah came outdoors together and sat down on the kitchen steps. Archer was the first to see me. He waved his hand, rose, and entered the house. Hannah rushed over to greet me.

"Oh! So you're back again! You were so long in returning that I was afraid something had happened."

"Yes, Hannah. But how shall I ever tell your sister that Paul Durand is dead? Help me."

She raised her face to mine (it appeared exquisite to me) and exclaimed:

"Paul Durand is dead? Is he really?"

"It's terrible indeed, but it's true."

She remained for a moment in thought, a melancholy smile hovering over her lips.

"Strange how everything is working out! You don't know how to break the news to Maggie? Well, Maggie didn't know how she was going to break the news to poor Paul. Maggie is getting married. She is marrying George O'Connor who has been running the store in town for the last few months. That's why we are having the dance today."

The violin began playing again. When I started toward the house, she took my hand.

"Stay here a moment before going in. Tell me about it. Was it cold?"

"Paul Durand died of it."

"Yes, you told me he was dead." (There was a slight tone of impatience in her voice.) "But you, did you suffer? You bad boy, I've thought of you so much. Perhaps I shouldn't have told you that."

"And supposing I should tell you that thoughts of you have been very dear to me? But I imagine you took advantage of the winter by dancing with Archer."

"Oh, forget Archer, please! Yes, I danced with

him. But what of it? Can't I dance with him and think of you?"

"But why should you have thought of me? Have I ever courted you?"

She seemed provoked by this remark.

"I don't know. I suppose not. But . . . " Then brusquely: "Why did you say that to me?"

It was my turn to hesitate. I heard the violin scraping the tune of "Don't do it again, Mrs. Flannagan." Then bravely, cold sweat gathering on my forehead:

"Supposing I should tell you something?"

"Tell me what?"

"That . . . that I love you, for example."

"Well?"

"Well? Would you be angry?"

She remained thoughtful a moment and then raised her eyes.

"Let me think about it," she begged. "Let's go in."

"Yes. But will you break the news to Maggie?"

"I will tell her." Then with a strangely bitter smile, "I don't believe it's necessary to let her down easy. They say joy kills, but I suppose that's a lie."

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It was an Irish family party. All the family including Archer were present. The blue, murderous eye of Archer told more about the girl's attitude to-

ward me than she had been able to confess to me herself—at least in daylight. I wondered what the reasons for Archer's evident hostility toward me were. Probably my name had cropped up during the winter. Archer doubtless had had jealous quarrels with Hannah, and doubtless, too, he had received certain replies. I would have given a great deal of money to learn what they had been.

An auburn haired young Irishman was present with intelligent and mystic green eyes; eyes full of those restless dreams that have existed for so many centuries in Ireland since the time Pembroke robbed the Cymrics of their freedom. He pulled Maggie close to him when the quadrille placed her in his arms. Without doubt he was George O'Connor. Archer was dancing with one of the three MacMurray girls. He pretended he was entirely engrossed by his partner.

Huge O'Molloy cordially shook my hand. I could see his wife through the door, kneeling before the stove and taking out a pie. Then turning, she greeted me with a faded smile. Everyone seemed to be celebrating. Even Archer's silent anger seemed to predict happiness.

The music ceased. The dancers wiped their brows. George O'Connor offered chewing gum to Maggie and to the MacMurray girls. Hannah slipped up to

Maggie and whispered in her ear. The blood fled from the girl's face. Was she going to faint, as I had feared?

But no! A triumphant smile gleamed on her lips. Running over to me she corroborated the news. Disgust assailed me.

"Is it really true?" she asked. "So it really did work out all right. I was so afraid of his return."

I could only bow my head. Love's triumph seemed a cynical thing. Should I tell her that I had been empowered by Paul Durand to give her all his possessions? Without doubt it would have enhanced the scene with a pretty touch of real tragedy. But what hateful irony it would be for the dead man! I mastered my desire to fling both her money and my scorn into her face. I chose to think about it and remain silent. However, I said:

"Poor Paul."

Turning on her heel, she hurried back to her partner. The violin began playing the "break-down," (the finale of the quadrille). The contact of my shoulder with that of Hannah already had mollified my anger.

This "break down" in the quadrille, borrowed from the old repertory of Gallic tunes, expresses a tumult that is both tragic and jubilant. While the violin shrilled this music, which had originally been

written for bagpipes, my mind entered into the rhythm of the furious cadence. Leaning back against the wall we pressed our shoulders against each other. And all the great desire that had formed so slowly in the bleak cold of the North ripened at this sudden touch of warmth. I needed only to turn my eyes toward the troubled eyes of Hannah to read the reply in them which she had failed to give me a short while before.

During the next few days I visited the O'Molloy farm nearly every evening. Hannah and I had not mentioned the question which was uppermost in both our minds, though the question seemed to have been decided once and for all by the rest of the O'Molloys. Tim, the silent, returning from the barn, the last rays of the setting sun gleaming in his hair, would greet Hannah and me with the same smile with which he greeted Maggie and George O'Connor who were to marry as soon as the planting season was over.

We two couples were the main source of conversation at table. Archer had become taciturn and O'Molloy watched him with sarcastic curiosity. Then one evening Archer suddenly left the table, his face as flaming red as his hair. No one uttered a word. We heard him go upstairs to his room which he shared

with the two O'Molloy boys. The ceiling echoed with the sound of objects flung upon the floor immediately above it.

Soon after dinner when Hannah and I in silence were gazing over the brown and pale green fields towards that attenuated band of gold and purple which the setting sun stretched along the flat horizon, Archer dressed in his best suit and wearing his best hat appeared with two suit-cases. O'Molloy hurried toward him. We heard sudden bursts of angry conversation. Then Archer turned his back on O'Molloy and without a word to anyone, swung open the gate, and rapidly disappeared down the road.

"Good luck to him," exclaimed Hannah. And her laugh melted into the twilight like a falling star.

With one accord we gathered round O'Molloy.

"The planting isn't done yet," said O'Molloy, "and here is that damn Archer leaving me flat. The devil take him."

"O forget him!" Tim broke in. "It's been long enough that the hired man has given orders around here. No one has dared call his soul his own without asking that son of a gun first."

We were all astonished to hear Tim say so much at one time. Then, smiling sympathetically toward Hannah and me, he added:

"I imagine this charming couple forgot to ask him if he would let them get married."

"That's probably about what it comes to," said O'Molloy.

He stroked his yellow beard as if to assure himself that no one had stolen his treasure, and then continued:

"But the planting isn't done yet. And we are short a man."

I leaped at the opportunity.

"If it isn't disagreeable to you, I can do Archer's work. A planter and a team of four isn't hard to handle."

"Ha, ha! Frenchy," laughed Hannah. "So you're a jack-of-all-trades! The day before yesterday a cowboy. Yesterday a fur-trader. And today a farmer. And what else will you be?"

Tim (I certainly had become fond of the lad) stopped puffing at his pipe and unbuttoning the collar of his black shirt as if the words choked him, said:

"Oh, well. I bet Frenchy can beat Archer at planting." Then bursting into laughter, he added:

"Seems as if he had beaten him in another way already."

O'Connor, lighting a cigar, murmured between his teeth:

"He's beaten him at his own game. What do you say, Maggie?"

"I shouldn't wonder if we'll have two marriages on the very same day."

"By Saint Patrick!" cried O'Molloy. "And if that isn't an idea, too! But neither Hannah nor Frenchy have said a word about it so far as I know."

"It's up to Frenchy to say something," said Hannah, nudging me with her elbow.

Immediately everyone shouted in unison:

"What does Frenchy say? What does Frenchy say?"

The dogs began barking and a cow mooed. It all made such a racket that I had to wait a moment before I could acquiesce to their demands.

I took Archer's place in the untidy room where the two O'Molloy boys filled one bed with their twin corpulence. Didn't I have to rise at dawn to drive the planter? But their snoring kept me awake. At least I accused their snoring of preventing sleep. But there was also that thin partition which separated me from the girls' bedroom where it seemed as if a heart beat in harmony with mine.

And Hannah, after I had curry-combed, fed and harnessed my four horses, served me porridge, bacon

and eggs, and potatoes for breakfast the next morning.

While the dust the planter raised dirtied my face, I tried to come to some decision in regard to Paul Durand's property. I could not persuade myself to deed it over to Maggie. On the other hand my refusal to do so would be a betrayal of the faith the dead man had placed in me. Yes, but he had not foreseen that Maggie had planned to betray him, even if he had not died. Should I not consider this unforeseen element before reaching a decison?

I finally reached one, but not before I had considered every aspect of the case. I took advantage of the first rainy day to go to the bank in town. There as executor of Paul Durand's will I made out a check and sent it to his sister, the only relation of his I knew of. I had found her address among some of Paul's papers. I suppose that I should have led Maggie into a conversation wherein she would have renounced everything that might remind her of her former fiance. But as soon as that idea entered my head I put it aside as worthless. And, moreover, I felt completely absolved of any guilt in the matter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Birth Again

AFTER the customary onslaught of more or less stupid jokes which people who have nothing better to do make about engaged couples, I led Hannah to the altar on the same day that George O'Connor led Maggie there.

All those who attended the ceremony were Irish except me and a number of people who attended out of curiosity. The priest who officiated was named Father MacMahon. He could not resist the temptation of making a speech to remind us all that French blood had been shed in Ireland side by side with that of the sons of Erin. It appeared quite natural to him that this marriage was in some way a consolation for the defeat at the battle of Boyne. He took pleasure—though without regard to the fact that I had been born in Lorraine—in affirming that the French and Irish belonged to the same Celtic race. But I had other things to do than to argue with him. Hannah and I departed after our hands had been affectionately pressed by everyone who had

taken a day off. The buggies and impatient horses of the guests were drawn up along the sides of the little wooden chapel which closely resembled a Nuremberg toy.

Grant did not fail to bring his biblical erudition into play. His malice assumed a terrifying form when he began quoting from the Proverbs.

" 'You are trapped by the words of your mouth', as the Scripture says." But he also added, " 'A virtuous woman is more precious than rubies, for the heart of her husband rests secure in her.' "

He would have quoted all of Chapter XXXI of Proverbs had MacPherson not clapped a hand over his mouth.

"Come! Come! Old man. There's a time for everything. Father MacMahon has given them enough religion already, even though he is tainted with Papist superstition. I think they've had enough of it for a while. Now it's my idea that they should fill our bellies. This young man has a lot of hard work ahead of him. Ha, ha! And I, I must go curry-comb my horses. After which, as the song says, 'And there's something in the bottle for the morning.' "

You have probably guessed that our honeymoon was all it should have been. That is to say, after our engagement we revealed the pleasantest sides of our

nature, but after our marriage the first few days seemed to bring out what was most dissonant in them. And as always happens to inexperienced young people we both did not have enough common sense to be content with what life offered us. Instead of accepting the fact that Life is an improvident Host and taking many things with us to his banquet even if they were unnecessary, we insisted upon demanding those luxuries that Life in his poverty could not offer us himself. The result was a series of quarrels and tender reconciliations.

Even my books, for some strange reason, became the subject of our quarrels. That a woman could become jealous of a library was something I had never imagined possible. Aside from a magazine of cooking recipes and dress patterns, Hannah read not at all. I do not know where she got the idea that French books contained nothing but revolting pornography.

"You keep reading those disgusting French books," she said, "even at the risk of eternal damnation."

And thrusting out her lips in an odious duck's beak (Heavens! how ugly she seemed!) she shook her finger in my face and began attacking the *Thoughts* of Pascal I was reading.

I translated a section or two and she accused me of pure invention. Everyone knew, said she, that the French produced only immoral books. And if that

man Pascal, as I had called him, really had written a book of the kind I described, everyone would have heard about it. No one at school had ever mentioned him. On the contrary, the members of his race . . .

I interrupted to ask her if she had ever heard of Wycherley, Vanbrugh, or Smollett. She had never heard of any of them. For the purpose of showing her that the English classics were guilty of those crimes she assumed only the French committed, I advised her to read *The Country Wife* by Wycherley. She stuffed her fingers in her ears, and told me that reading made her head ache, anyway. And what was more, if those works were so full of disgusting passages as I pretended they were—which she refused to believe—I certainly proved I was an unregenerate sinner for having the volumes on my shelves at the risk of getting some poor soul damned to all eternity.

"You talk like the Reverend Jeremy Collier," I told her.

"I don't care," she retorted, brandishing a rolling pin. "I never heard of that minister but he had the right idea."

"He was a hard-shelled Methodist," said I.

"Better to be a hard-shelled Methodist like him, than a renegade Catholic like you! I . . . I . . . I will ask Father MacMahon what he thinks."

But I never found out what the Father said.

So the *Thoughts* of Pascal, the Restoration Plays, and the novels of Smollett caused our first conjugal quarrels, the most profoundly tragic of all those I remember, tragic not because of their violence, but because they were fundamental. I then realized what the real Hannah was. The Hannah I had envisioned in a miracle of gold and opal twilight, the Hannah I had beheld at a great distance reflected in the dazzling mirror of ice and snow, had vanished. It was a shadow I had followed; but it was, alas, a reality I embraced.

Nothing remained for me to do but to become a practical philosopher. That this marriage from the very beginning had proved itself to be something of a stupidity, was perhaps a fortunate thing in my unhappiness. That indomitable will I had displayed under the most harrowing circumstances in the North, a will which had enabled me to triumph over fatigue, hunger and death, might also enable me to conquer in the struggle which had assumed the smiling and deceitful mask of love.

The forest became my confidant. This alliance seemed to outrage Hannah. She was not less jealous when she saw me, gun across my arm, proceeding with a deliberate step into the mauve and golden

depths of the woods. The woods seemed like a trap to her, but to me they were an escape.

When lunch was over and she saw me take up my gun and start for the door, she could not contain her anger. She reproached me for preferring the forest to her. That was true, but it nevertheless struck me as being the fundamental antagonism between man and woman. There is hardly a man who does not like to set aside a few hours of the day for silent meditation. And there is hardly a woman, on the other hand, who does not find that solitude crushes her. But though I inwardly reproached myself for not completely sacrificing my freedom for her, the acid manner in which she delivered her protests angered me.

"I flee your ill temper," I told her. "Two hours of solitude will quiet you and calm me. Moreover, if you care to take advantage of the good weather to visit your family or your sister, or some of your friends, you know very well that you are free to do so. You have only to ask for it and the buggy is at your disposal. Prince is a gentle and patient horse, and I will harness him up if you want me to."

So from the earliest days of our marriage we adopted the custom of separating during the afternoon.

I imagined, perhaps wrongly, that we were victims of the incompatibility of our two distinct races. She as a Celt could really not have helped but bring a spirit of anarchy into the family; a spirit of anarchy that had existed throughout the centuries, throughout all tyrannies, and throughout all attempts at reconciliation.

Love, melancholy, and that ardent longing for death—so ardent that it strove to take others along with it—seemed to me to be my wife's fundamental characteristics. That she loved me, I did not doubt. And I returned her love passionately. But it was soon evident that this love could not supersede the bounds of melancholy. To a certain degree she found happiness in tears. If no sadness had existed she would have invented some. At least so I imagined, for I could not otherwise explain, save by her need for exaggerated oppositions, her quest for pain during those moments that brought me only happiness. She evinced this yearning for annihilation even during our embraces. I had noticed how she closed her eyes, certainly forgetting my existence, forgetting her own existence, too, more possessed it would seem by a desire for annihilation than by an exaltation of life. I remembered the great lesson the forest had vouchsafed me, that ceaseless reiteration of the truth that life is by nature a sublime and tragic mixture of pain

and pleasure; or if you prefer it, of love and death. I here found a strange application of its truth. I was amazed that this charming, cruel and melancholy Celtic race, being as it was so penetrated by the desire for death, had not been long since extinguished. But no! Though she desired to die, life was all the more deeply rooted in her heart.

If, on the contrary, I sought to analyze myself, I discovered that along with a sense of innate discipline, I possessed that passion for living that transfers itself into action. Perhaps I was as much a dreamer as the Celts themselves. But my dreams were dreams of action. To act! To act! To accept every danger for the joy of triumph. To give because I felt myself capable of producing. To prove, in short, that I was a man, a living man. This was, I believe, the dominating characteristic of my temperament.

Perhaps my acts might easily have taken a destructive direction. What moderated them in this respect was the reverence, timid perhaps, which Latinity has imposed upon our barbarous souls. Reflecting upon this I decided that the reverence I displayed toward so many beautiful things was a kind of humiliation. It perhaps implied an ineptitude on my part to create them. I despised myself for this. Our fathers had fewer scruples, particularly those who destroyed the masterpieces of Gallo-Roman art.

And when I reflected upon our love it seemed to me that though Hannah derived from my love that urge to annihilate herself, to escape both from me and from herself, I, without effort on my part and thanks to my innate power of life, nevertheless gave her something new, something very deep and very personal.

These ideas were of scant help to me. She was incapable of understanding them. How could I explain to her that I gave her life which she transformed into death? Even had she been on my intellectual plane I think our racial differences would have been so influential that our judgment and understanding would have been affected by them, even in spite of a common civilization. Thus did our poor, sad and tragic story epitomize those striking differences that are always evident between races. A new form of nationalism rose consciously in me, unconsciously in her, and contributed toward making us both suffer.

Yes! The forest became my confidant.

There I found bitterer and more immediate dramas of love. All the female insects who massacre the male after the consummation of love now illustrated the struggle I was experiencing. But I was glad that Hannah was nevertheless not quite so fierce as the female pike that devours her mate immediately after

he has fertilized her eggs. (Perhaps it is in revenge for the pain of laying them.) These lessons offered by bloody-clawed Nature had the advantage of throwing the conjugal struggle into high relief. It no longer remained a simple question of racial difference. It rose to the position of antagonism between two principles.

On the sand hills a few hundred paces away, a family of wolves angered me because they insolently proclaimed the joys of home life.

I knew it was a couple who had chosen their home under a tangled mass of uprooted trees. They had burrowed a hole beneath a huge stump. I did not need to see it to realize the care with which it had been tunneled, with a winding passage to prevent all danger of rains flooding the she-wolf's den. This den had first been covered with a layer of dry leaves and then with soft, warm hair. No, I had not seen it, but I had opened hundreds that were similar. Here all the whelps were born, for whom father and mother wolf hunted together every night. I heard their first yelpings, those that announced their purpose. Then the female would become silent. It meant that she was lying in wait. The wolf would begin barking, skilfully directing the flight of the game he had raised. Should you have been close by you would have heard the shrill death-cry of the hare as

the she-wolf sprang upon it and sank her fangs into its spine. The wolf would hasten up and he and his mate would begin tearing at their prey. What growling and snarling there would be! Not a delicate or polite couple! But there are more hares in the woods. And when the two parents had gorged themselves they would begin hunting food for their offspring. Charming conjugal pleasures! And not more bloody than a human household, where slaughtered meat is also devoured. Yes! But there was snarling and fighting. Indeed, even in nature all was not perfect at home.

Nevertheless, the pair of wolves had afforded me an important lesson. If they were happy, and they certainly were, it was because each one quickly forgot painful incidents so that they would only remember the tenderness necessary to sustain the heavy burden of Life and Death. Was it too late for us to do likewise? And because I was a man and Hannah a woman should we for that reason be ashamed to take a lesson from the animals?

I told her this little fable. Hannah who did not like to read, adored hearing stories. I now realized that the affection which she had for so long borne toward Archer was based on the fact that he knew all the Irish folk tales. What man couldn't win a

daughter of Erin, if he could tell her the story of Deirdre's unhappiness? Tell, did I say? I should have said, sing. The Celtic race can never and will never exist without its bards. And Archer was doubtless one of them.

This thought filled me with futile jealousy, futile because Archer was far away, so far away that no one knew what had become of him. However, this jealousy contributed toward bringing me closer to Hannah. For having told me the tragedy of Deirdre in words wherein I recognized the poetic malice of my old rival, she aroused a secret rivalry in me. But my stories always lacked an undertone of melancholy. And when I had finished telling one, the thoughtful little head of golden hair, a little disappointed, would hide itself on my shoulder, doubtless imagining other and more poignant incidents than those a plain-spoken man of action could tell her.

"I don't know why," she once said, "but it's impossible to cry over your stories. Even though I want to very much and even though they seem full of pity, too. But you tell sad stories as coldly as an Englishman."

I feared that loneliness preyed upon her. For anyone who did not care to read, or meditate, or take

long walks through the woods, existence, thought, must be completely devoid of charm. I suggested to Hannah that we rent a little place in Winnipeg, for example, where we could live together for a few weeks. And if the theater could amuse her—to my mind its amusements were never anything very much —I would be delighted to take her there.

To my surprise she refused. She had been raised on a farm, she said, and the country pleased her. Never would she dare confide the milking of her cows to anyone else. Heavens no! She would be too afraid that they would not be milked properly and that they would go dry. And the hens! How could she leave them? Hadn't she planned to build separate coops and raise fancy birds? And if she wasn't there to oversee it, the leghorns might get mixed up with the orpingtons, and the wyandottes with both. That would be a fine state of affairs!

"But my dear," said I. "I am not a farmer like the rest of them around here. I have a large bank account, thanks to my horse and fur trading. And the live stock I raise here brings in something. Why should you slave here? Isn't it dangerous for you in your present condition? You must be careful now that the baby is nearly here, and . . ."

I didn't have the last word. She said that she would continue living the life of a farmer's wife, and I

shouldn't reproach her for not being, she added bitterly, like one of those lazy French women who have nothing better to do than read yellow backed novels. Nothing I said could dissuade her from her duties. Moreover it wasn't very nice of me to make impertinent remarks about her condition. I certainly didn't have much shame or modesty. . . .

She ran on like this for some time, revealing a truly remarkable gift for long-windedness. I learned from her that instead of talking about my bank account I would do much better if I took hold of the handles of a plough, just as, thank God, all the past, present, and future O'Molloys had done.

A farmer's wife! She was indeed that, and far beyond my own taste. It would not have displeased me to have seen her a little more stylish. The scorn she had for being neat and well-dressed pained me.

"But what does it matter to you?" she asked. "We don't see anyone except my family and my sister. What good does it do you if I'm well dressed? I dress well enough for just us two."

"But, darling! It's not vanity that makes me want to see you a little less . . . a little more elegant. It's personal pleasure. Do you think I haven't eyes like everyone else?"

"Then you like me for my clothes and not for myself?" she retorted.

We enjoyed the golden splendor of autumn and the silver splendor of winter. Hannah obstinately refused to leave the farm for a maternity hospital where she could have all the doctors, mid-wives, and nurses that I desired her to have. So in the midst of a beautiful blizzard I one day had to hitch my horses to a sleigh and hurry for necessary aid.

As a precautionary measure I stopped at each farm. And when I returned with Mrs. O'Molloy and an old half-breed who had acquired some fame in the country as a *Juno lucina,* I found my home crowded with inquisitive and charitable women who had hurried there to help my wife and to watch her suffer. Their devotion to my wife was mingled with a slight touch of cruelty. The sharp voice of Mrs. MacPherson was an octave higher than the deep contralto of Mrs. Grant, the latter having been abundantly supplied by her husband with biblical quotations, among them being one she repeated like a terrible refrain, "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth."

"What use is it to keep repeating that?" Mrs. MacPherson exclaimed. "Don't you realize the poor thing

will know it well enough when the time comes? Be brave, my child, the worst is yet to come."

Hannah glanced toward me with a look of despair, silently imploring my help. I pushed Mrs. Campbell aside, her bony shoulders preventing me from coming near the bed, and then melted into tears as I kissed my wife.

"Don't leave me," she begged.

As if by mutual agreement the three Scotch women and Mrs. O'Molloy joined ranks to pronounce a sentence of banishment against me. With her sour and wrinkled face framed in a black shawl, old gammer Gaudry, the half-breed, winked at me and said:

"Do you think men are good for anything in this business? Don't bother her any more now. When I began feeling the pain I always sent my husband off packing to drink with his friends. What do you think of the idea of getting me a drop or two. A bit of gin helps us old 'uns to do our work. And besides, there's going to be an awful long time before the baby comes. In four or five hours we'll come and tell you, but not before."

And she lighted her old clay pipe to the great scandal of Mrs. MacPherson.

Some hours later, when I was nervously chewing on a cigar in the next room, I heard a scream, then

murmurs of joy, the wailing of a child, and the door opened.

"Kiss your daughter," said Mrs. O'Molloy sternly, as if she wished to punish me.

Old gammer Gaudry removed her pipe long enough to say:

"Look at her, the poor little creature. She's a perfect picture of you. In eight days she won't look like you at all. And in twenty years she will look like you again. That's the way it always is. Give me a little, teeny drop of gin. It dries my throat to hear the little tot cry like that."

So did happiness enter our home. Naturally the spring seemed more glorious than ever. Never before had the scarlet bark of the dogwood contrasted so gaily with the pale green of its foliage. Never before had I counted so many white stars in the blossoms of the pembina. I realized that all this was childishness, but even so it was pleasant to give way to my illusions. Thus I as a man of Life and of Joy became intoxicated with Life and Joy.

Yes. It was a rare period in my life. Crr . . . crr . . . crr . . . the cranes soared past, neck and legs extended, in their flight north. Kla . . . kla . . . kla. . . cried the geese as they flew in their swift triangles. In pools of water through which I splashed plovers

ran before me as if tempting me to fire at them. Tuy . . . tuy . . . tuy . . . I cried, mocking them. And they would halt and turn their long beaked heads toward me. Ducks paddled about in pairs, as much as to say that they had been granted safe-conduct. More than ever did I respect Love and I fired only at those that were unmated.

But I did not spend so much time outdoors as I had formerly done. What made me hasten home was to see that feeble little being whom Gammer Gaudry said resembled me so strikingly.

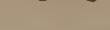
Treaty of Peace. Treaty of Discord, too! A struggle between paternal and maternal love began. Which of the two loved her the best? On this point we were almost allied. For whom would she grant her smiles? We became enemies. Tenderness and jealousy struggled within us. Our words of love took on the color of defiance. But our words of anger ended in sighs of sweetness. We lived under the impulse of a new rhythm.

Many things occupied us both. Baby Lucy became interested in the light of the lamp. Or rather she recognized the existence of her eyes by covering them with her little fingers. We were both equally worried

when she coughed. But we still remained strangely, hostilely jealous. We had suddenly become enemies over a smile.

Almost without our being aware of it, the question of nationality began to play an important part. When Baby Lucy grew up I naturally spoke French to her, while her mother spoke English.

When she learned the language I spoke more rapidly than she learned that of her mother, it was a triumph for me, a disaster for Hannah. And if at the O'Molloys, Baby Lucy, playing with her grandfather's beard, happened to repeat one of the sounds that issued from the mouth of the Irishman, all the family would rejoice at this victory over the French language. Thus these excellent people, of whom not one would have approved of the stupid horrors of an unreasoning war, assumed in common a spirit of chauvinism and aggression. I felt that I was the Enemy.



It was an unfortunate situation which I nevertheless put up with. Hannah was a faithful and conscientious wife, with bursts of wild tenderness. Year by year I felt that habit growing within which is the basis of so many deep-rooted affections. Taking example from Hannah's changed attitude, I attached

an almost inestimable price to these ephemeral bursts of tenderness. And perhaps because we felt them to be fragile, we strove to cling to them for all eternity.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Death of a Stag

ONE spring evening, shortly after we had celebrated Baby Lucy's third birthday, I was returning home after an afternoon of duck hunting when I observed a rather stylish looking buggy and an unknown horse hitched in front of our house.

Inside I heard the voice of a man. I recognized the voice, but for the life of me I could not remember whom it belonged to. Who talked like that? Who could fill Hannah's laugh with so much animation? Who could arouse little screams of delight from Baby Lucy? I pushed open the door.

Unchanged, his hair as red as ever, Archer rose and offered me his hand casually. His smile was more pleasant than I had ever seen it. The pale blue of his eyes shone with golden malice.

At ease, Archer told us his story with such a profuseness of detail that it seemed to be a sort of alibi. He had toured the United States, he had gone up into British Columbia where he had prospected for gold. Having returned to Saskatchewan to pay off

an old debt, he had discovered that Paul Durand's concession had never been recorded.

"It was doing no one any harm," he said, "to have it annulled. So I then stepped into the shoes of the dead man. The soil is fertile. I knew that. So here I am as your neighbor and you can wager that I'll be a good one."

Did he still love Hannah? I tried to divine the answer to that question. The too mobile happiness of his eyes remained impenetrable. Hannah, as I thought, was indifferently happy. To her, I reassured myself, Archer's return was merely an unexpected meeting with an old friend, and nothing more.

All during supper, which Archer shared with us, I watched them. I did not feel jealous. However, I now remember that I felt the need of protecting Hannah with a cloak of tenderness.

Archer was a peaceful and quiet neighbor whom I occasionally saw between two clumps of trees patiently clearing the land, the reins over his shoulders, his extended arms resting on the handles of the heavy clearing plough. From afar the wind would carry us his voice as he swore at his horses:

"Damn you, Polly, giddap! Giddap you lazy son

of a gun! Gee haw. Back, Pete! Back, damn your soul! Whoa!"

In the evening, neat and freshly shaved, he would frequently call. He would seat himself, carefully pare off some plug tobacco, fill his pipe, play with Baby Lucy. When he called Hannah by her first name it might have annoyed me as a Frenchman; but I realized that this liberty is quite customary in the West and no one is astonished by it. My books did not interest Hannah, but he occasionally took one down from the shelf. He would read a passage from "Pickwick Papers," a sentence from the "Book of Snobs," or one of Shakespeare's sonnets. His Irish brogue would disappear when he read aloud. And Hannah, suddenly interested, would stand with a dish cloth in one hand and a plate in the other, respectfully listening to what she had formerly scorned when I had read it. I was both confounded and charmed.

On certain days Archer became a beloved poison. I loved to hear him read the opening lines of "Twelfth Night" or the pathetic tirades from "Venice Delivered." Did Hannah blame me for it secretly? It seemed to me that she was astonished that I accepted Archer as my superior in reading poetry. But that extraordinary man could render the most magnificent, the most superb, the loftiest speci-

mens of English poetry. That he could endow Shakespeare, Otway, Marlowe, Spencer, Sidney with the rhythm of so disturbing a music was hateful to me. Yes, hateful! But I myself handed him the book.

"Archer! I have always liked that passage. I am curious to know how you would read it."

And he would take the book, open at the passage I had marked. At first he would glance through it. Then in a voice that each time transformed him into a perfect stranger, he would begin. We surrendered to his voice. It was not for some time after he had ceased reading that the silence could break that mysterious, indefinable charm that had descended upon us. I would then be amazed to see Archer in his blue overalls, his black shirt slightly discolored at the arm pits, and the red and yellow bandana around his throat. I would also be rather abashed to see Hannah pensive, transported. Many years before I had been seriously injured in a game of Rugby. My injuries had been dressed after I had been given cocaine. The return to pain after euphoria was a memory that then recurred.

"Archer," thought I, "you are an opiate."

Did I take Hannah to Winnipeg? Or was it Hannah who took me there? Who knows? She had always declined the offer I made her of accompanying

me whenever I went to the city on business, but now she liked to go whenever I did. While we were gone Baby Lucy's grandparents took care of her. (Threads of silver were already creeping into the golden hair over O'Molloy's temples.) Hannah led me into the great department stores, particularly Eaton's which was the glory of Winnipeg.

She ransacked the counters for hats and dresses. Standing before mirrors she would test out various colored fabrics to see how they would go with her complexion and her hair.

I told her that mauve was most becoming to her and black perhaps even more so. But it was impossible to make her understand how extraordinarily well black set off her loveliness. She accepted mauve and deep blues. I succeeded in persuading her not to take yellow. Amused, a large saleslady took a malicious pleasure in smilingly offering orange and old gold tinted dresses that might have been becoming to a brunette, but which struggled victoriously with Hannah's blond hair and with her pale complexion dotted here and there with freckles.

"It isn't the dress you ought to consider," I told her, "it is the woman. Believe a Frenchman. Our country has a genius for things like that."

Afterwards on the floor above we would eat ice

cream, slowly nibbling it with our spoons. The strawberry ice cream was all one could desire. From the immense emporium rose the confused murmurs of thousands of sellers and buyers. There were rich farmers who discussed the value of agricultural machines, the strength of a harness, or the elegance of a buggy. On the other floors wives sampled Orange Pekoe tea gathered in the valleys of Darjeeling by Hindoo women, or the green tea, dried in baskets by little Japanese women with slanting eyes and gay dresses against a background that seemed to have been painted by Hokousai. Farther on purchasers felt precious furs. Elegant ladies would have their hair waved in the beauty parlors. Drug clerks sold laxatives to gentlemen suffering from constipation. A country woman waited to see the dentist on the second floor. A loving husband tried an evening cloak from Paris over the shoulders of his young wife. I saw them later at the jewelry counter looking at genuine diamonds.

Hannah having completed her purchases, I managed to pass a quarter of an hour before the book shelves, while she stared at shop windows. I observed that her investigations, alas, were not without certain results. That evening in the hotel room I caught her standing before a tall mirror studying the false and frozen postures which unimaginative shop-

window decorators, eager to obtain an artificial elegance, give to their mannikins. The stupid gesture of the hands, the grotesque posture which makes their bodies unbalanced, nothing was lacking.

"In a woman," I said, "I like nothing better than natural grace."

Without quitting her pose she turned toward me to say:

"You yourself are always scolding me for my lack of style."

"It's true. But I want your style to be really refined. By that I mean simple and natural. I don't like faults in taste. You have committed a number of them just now. You are wearing patent leather pumps and a traveling dress. Separately they would be correct. But these two articles shriek from being worn together. Moreover, your posture is entirely artificial. Look!"

And giving her a slight push, I made her lose her balance. She fell against a chair, absolutely furious.

"Pardon me, darling. I simply wanted to show you how artificial your posture was: it is disgraceful to lose one's balance and for that reason it is disgraceful to maintain a posture in which the weight is not properly balanced, and . . ."

But the conjugal tempest prevented me from saying more. We went to bed, back to back. Morning,

however, brought reconciliation and she packed her trunk with the treasures we had with a barrage of dollars captured from the Winnipeg storekeepers.

I was delighted to see her so well dressed. Though my remarks had precipitated a storm of anger, her sensibilities, as Irish as her temper, had led her to profit by all my suggestions.

Freed at last from the noise of the train, we lunched with the O'Connors above the store. Hannah relished her brother-in-law's compliments and Maggie's evident jealousy as if they were rare fruits. She unpacked her trunks, disappeared into Maggie's room and returned garbed in a new dress.

"It's very pretty," Maggie said. "But I would like to know what Frenchy's check book would say about it."

O'Connor felt the fabric professionally and attempted to guess its price. Meanwhile, forgotten because of his aunt's stylishness, his father's professional curiosity, and the polite but keen jealousy of his mother, little Michael O'Connor, a contemporary of Baby Lucy, sought refuge in me. He climbed onto my shoulders, pulled my watch from my pocket to see its wheels turn, robbed me of the candy I had brought back for his mother, daubed himself over

with chocolate, wiped his hands on the green velvet curtains, and screamed like a wild beast.

"And Baby Lucy?" I suggested to Hannah.

"Good gracious! I had forgotten all about her!"

So this woman who had never been interested in clothes before had now become so wrapped up in the occupation of beautifying herself that she had forgotten about her child. I twitted her about it. She replied angrily. Instead of replying I remarked:

"Your dresses are very lovely, but you have forgotten the most important thing."

"And what is that?"

"Underthings."

"But no one will ever see them."

I shrugged my shoulders and went out into the barn to harness the horse.

Here again my advice bore fruit. I was asked to write a check so that she could send an order to Th. Eaton & Co. for a selection of underthings. However, she consulted me as to a choice and when I flatly announced my preference for white, the colored underthings were stricken from the list. French taste had triumphed again.

Peace now ruled in our household. I had, moreover, become the object of delicate attentions. She

remembered my birthday (I myself had forgotten all about it) and I was surprised to receive a pretty edition of Tristram Shandy. She told me with a delicious blush that Archer had suggested it. I was also permitted to roam through the woods whenever I pleased. And at my return I was greeted with something I had never before been able to obtain—a dining table decorated with flowers. All this, I believed, was gratitude rendered me for the purchases I had allowed her to make in Winnipeg. A feeling of tenderness welled up within me.

Once again we enjoyed the symphony of autumn played by an orchestra of bronze. Migratory birds sang in the air. We watched the sun sink slowly in the west. And winter was born.

In the first days of winter when a light blanket of snow covering the ground permitted forest life to inscribe imprudently too many of its secrets, I left, one pearl colored morning, to go deer hunting.

I had not walked for more than a quarter of a mile when, as I rounded a clump of trees, I found myself face to face with Archer. He held a small 30-30 calibre rifle in his hand, a rifle I had seen him carrying before. He had left home for the same reason I had and I proposed that he join me in our common quest for a good quarter of venison.

Wait, while I try to recall everything.

We followed the tracks of a large deer along the edge of a swamp whose shore was lined with rushes gleaming like a display of oriental sceptres. I remarked to Archer that our quarry must be a large buck for his tracks were deep and his hoofs well marked in the form of a heart. He had followed a long coulee between the woods and the swamp, and seemed to have no doubt as to his destination. We still had quite a distance to go before we would be near enough to fire upon him. I remember that I predicted that because of the wind and the mildness of the temperature we would probably find him to the south of the cliffs in a clearing where the sun was bright. A mild east wind was blowing and even though we were lightly clad we both felt warm.

We followed the tracks, smoking when we pleased and conversing in low voices without paying much attention to the sudden flight of a prairie hen or a scurrying rabbit. As we proceeded I outlined some of the lessons wild life had taught me and some of the mysteries of animal existence. I explained the why and wherefore of certain things; the role of fear in the preservation of the species, the underlying reasons for various animal reflexes, all that Nature offers us of the magnificent and the horrible, of delight and cruelty, of the living and the dead. For Life and

Death, eternally bound to each other, perpetuate themselves in that astonishing garland of joy and pain where they are woven in perfect proportion. Such, indeed, was the very theme of Nature. It is both marvellous and terrible. Whenever we escape from the artificial fabric of civilization we run against a world that sees only with the eyes of murder and of love, and no one can say which of the two is more deadly. With a strange earnestness Archer listened as I revealed those truths it is not wise to examine too deeply.

The tracks led us to the place where the buck had fed. We were already close to the section where I had predicted he would halt. The height at which he had nibbled last year's buds, still tender in spite of the frosts, certainly indicated what I had said from the very beginning: that he was a large animal. A little farther on his tracks no longer proceeded in a straight course. I advised Archer to finish his pipe where he was, while I would outline a plan of action worthy of the most adroit Indian hunter.

"This is my plan," I said. "The wind is coming from the west. We should therefore keep to the east of the buck. From now on we can expect to come across him at almost any moment. First of all we must travel in a wide circle. If we do not cross his tracks, or rather, if we do not cross them in

the place opposite to where we are now, we will know where he is. There will then be nothing more to do but to keep to windward of him and investigate every place where he is likely to be."

My predictions were borne out, for after we had skirted a few acres of thick underbrush and had not come across any tracks we knew the buck was feeding nearby. Trusting to my instincts and to my knowledge of the woods, I turned west in the direction of a series of small clearings which would afford us a better chance to use our rifles. We had not proceeded for more than a few hundred paces when the buck bounded from behind a dwarf willow and started off. I quickly raised my gun. At the moment he was rising in his fourth leap I aimed and following the rule which practice had taught me, I fired between his raised hoofs. The bullet entered his head, as I had meant it to, and it seemed as if the buck's rear legs rose in the air. He lunged forward on his horns and rolled over like an ordinary rabbit, spraying the snow to the left and right of him with bright red. Ignoring Archer, I hastened to the buck to bleed him. But as I leaned down to slit his throat, a bullet, like an angry hornet whined just above the nape of my neck.

I leaped to my feet and turned. Fifteen paces away Archer with a mad look in his eyes was reloading

his rifle. I immediately covered him with mine. He dropped his weapon.

"Step back a dozen paces from your gun!" I shouted.

He started to run.

"Halt."

Cold sweat gathered in my arm pits. Shudders rippled down my spine. It was with difficulty that I refrained from returning the shot.

Archer halted. I moved toward him cautiously. Having reached the spot where the gun lay, I made a cursory examination of the story written in the snow. No branches were near enough to have caught the trigger. Moreover the footprints proved that Archer had set himself before he fired. Finally his drawn face left no doubt of it. The wretch had fired at me in a fit of insanity.

"Archer!" I exclaimed. "Don't move. Let me pick up the rifle. Good. We will return the way we came. Please walk ahead of me. But in the name of heaven, Archer, why did you want to kill me?"

He did not respond. He did not even deny his murderous intention. But I was puzzled by the question. Why had Archer tried to kill me? Doubtless it was due to temporary insanity.

As I walked along behind him I continued to think about it. At the point where our paths sep-

arated I ordered him to return to his home. I took the road toward mine, still grasping the rifle that had failed to kill me a few moments previously.

I had not noticed that my hand and sleeve were smeared with the buck's blood.

I do not know why, but all the sang-froid that had saved me in this attempt upon my life, a sang-froid I had developed from long experience with danger, suddenly abandoned me. I became nervous and as I walked along I realized that I was trembling violently. I fought against it. Meanwhile I pictured the scene, not as an active participant, but as an impassive witness. His bullet had missed me by the slightest margin. His bad aim was perhaps due to his excitement. Or perhaps the bullet had missed because I had bent forward as I made a wide cut along the buck's neck. If he had shot me I would have fallen over the animal. With a slight rearrangement of the scene Archer could have persuaded a simple-minded coroner that it was all an accident. Yes, he could have sworn on a bible that I was in a direct line with the fleeing buck and that he had not seen me. To make his story entirely credible he would need only to make a series of footprints and place my body in line with the deer and the position he had fired from. Once more the newspapers would say:

"Another example of the danger of hunting in pairs." I imagined the headlines:

FRENCH SETTLER ACCIDENTALLY
KILLED DURING HUNTING TRIP

And a sub-title with this unconscious irony:

HE WORE DARK CLOTHES AND WAS MISTAKEN FOR A BUCK

This idea occurred to me as I pushed open the door.

"Archer fired at me!" I shouted as I entered the house. "Here is his rifle!"

And with my bloody hand I flung the weapon into a far corner of the room. Hannah glanced at my blood-stained hand. I saw her eyes widen. She paled, uttered a deep groan, and sank swooning to the floor. She lay there, an inert mass, while Baby Lucy filled the house with her tragic wailings. Where was the water? The vinegar? The brandy?

Hannah recovered consciousness and murmured in a dying voice:

"You've killed him. I hate you!"

This remark left me speechless for a moment. A lump rose in my throat. To avoid strangling I ripped open my shirt at the neck. With my throat bare,

long shocks of hair dangling over my forehead and eyes, I tried to explain.

"But, darling!"

"Don't you dare call me that!"

"But it was Archer that fired at me!"

"You lie!" Her voice was that of a mad woman and she pointed an accusing finger at me. "You have killed the only man who ever loved me: the only man I ever loved."

She flung the words into my face and I felt as if something had suddenly engulfed me. An earthquake! I stood speechless, like a guilty criminal. Dumbfounded, I could find no answer to the accusation, even though a single word would have been sufficient to clear me of the charge. But it was a small thing compared to the terrible confession which an extremity of sorrow had torn from my wife. My whole existence seemed to collapse and in my ringing ears I heard disconnected phrases:

"So filled with tenderness for me . . . returning to me . . . all that I suffered . . . days . . . he . . . dead! . . . and killed by you . . . never . . . words of tenderness . . . you have made my life a hell . . . he consoled me. . . . You have robbed me of him! . . . I hate you!"

Little did I care when by force of weeping she gave signs of swooning again. Even Baby Lucy, in-

nocent, a finger in her mouth, realized that a drama was taking place, but hesitated to join it. She took refuge behind my legs, weeping.

A new outburst of anger raised Hannah to her feet. With a furious gesture she tore the child from me.

"Don't you touch that murderer!" she screamed. "He would kill you just as he would kill me, just as he has killed a man who is worth far more than he."

In the pain which had now spread through my body and gnawed at my heart, I mastered myself sufficiently to cry:

"I did not harm a hair on the head of this . . . of your . . . of the man in question. He still lives, disarmed by me after he had attempted my life. And both of you can go to hell together!"

And I went outdoors, slamming the door behind me.

Outdoors I could consider the situation calmly. So Archer and Hannah had betrayed me! How long ago had it started? Doubtless about the time of our trip to Winnipeg. The purchase of the lace underthings. Absence of stylishness for me; display of elegance for him. And I, the simple lout I was, had offered her my advice. (My laughter rang strangely hollow in my ears.) And those attentions I had re-

ceived as a delicate recompense. The same old story. The same old, ever repeated story. The same trickery by simple means. God! How stupid men are!

Yes, deceived! But no anger rose within me. I divided myself into two parts and studied myself as a new being I had suddenly encountered. Deceived! Why wasn't I furious? There are those who kill and then kill themselves. Meanwhile bitter pain gnawed at my heart.

Strange. Faced by death I had been able to act, but now I was filled with incertitude. What would I do? I could no longer live as I had been living.

Sadness of life! Yes, but it is the struggle with life that is good. Was it this that had been lacking in our married life? Never the sensation of the real struggle. Never knowing until this very moment whether I was victor or vanquished. (But I know today!)

I saw her again in the glory of the setting sun. Pretty! Ah pretty! But still seated beside Archer. And had not the hate between us been battered down? Yes, when I had returned from the North I had had the sensation of victory, though in reality it was I, it was I who was the vanquished. Vanquished by death! Vanquished by the living! It would have been better had I enjoyed the clandestine pleasures of Edmonton a few days longer. I would have re-

turned purged. Yes, purged by revulsion, as I had in those beautiful years when the Prairie was not dead!

Vanquished! But vanquished by so sweet a trap that I had not perceived it. I imagined that such were the thoughts of birds caught in bird lime.

But what was there to do? There is no handbook for the use of deceived husbands. It is something our civilization lacks.

There are certain people who punish or pardon in an access of anger or generosity. One is always indulgent toward husbands who lose their heads. That is stupid. One must reflect, must carefully consider pardon or revenge.

I re-entered the house and changed my clothes. Hannah still remained sunk in an armchair. Neither of us uttered a word.

When I was fully dressed and had packed my valise, I scribbled on a sheet of paper:

"Leaving for Winnipeg. Will return in about eight days."

Then hitching the horse to the sleigh, I took the road to the village.

It was the road I usually took. It passed Archer's house. Doubtless he heard the sleigh-bells for I saw him open the door to glance out, for frost on the

window panes did not permit him to satisfy his curiosity by peering through the window.

I could not refrain from shouting:

"You can take advantage of my departure to complete your work. She is alone!"

At Winnipeg I wandered about aimlessly, blocking the sidewalk, while alert, square jawed men and boyish girls hastened by me as in a dream. It all seemed to belong to another world.

I tried to interest myself in business.

After an acrid discussion which for the moment made me forget my pain, a real estate salesman sold me some land situated in an undeveloped section. Blue prints, reports of city council meetings and of provincial parliaments danced before my eyes as if they wished to divert me with a sort of ballet. A business man with gold rimmed glasses, Mr. Hackett, strove to sell at a high price a piece of land that I wanted to buy at a low one. The discussion took on all the proportions of a struggle. Driven by the necessity of defending myself, I felt a vigorous mind forming within me again. I became combative, even to the point of aggressiveness. Mr. Hackett had attacked me fiercely, dealing me hard blows one after the other. When he had run out of breath, he lapsed

into silence. Taking up his arguments one at a time I strove to prove that they were fallacious. We compromised upon a price that was a victory for neither one of us. But I considered that the relaxation which this bargaining had afforded had helped me a great deal.

Visiting bar after bar I finally saw a face I recognized. But where the devil had I ever seen that big, merry looking fellow before? That fellow with his derby over one ear and a cigar in the corner of his mouth?

He hailed me in French Canadian. So it was David! The Prairie came to life again.

Loquacious, well-primed with gin, he gave me a rapid outline of his life since I had last seen him.

"Yes, my fren'. It's jus' lak I tole you. I set de fire to ma sapré cabine. I burn ev'ryting, saddle, harness, ev'ryting. But I have plenty monee right here in ma pocket. Adieux my horses! Anoder beezniz for me. I bought place between de two laks. Someting lak dat. St. Hormidas on Lak Manitoba. It's a new lan' dere. Good coloneest, mos' all Canayens. An good workers. De feeshin' durin' da win'er tam bring plenty monee. I bought beeg hotel dere. I take out a licence. It's a good life dat o' hotel keeper. An I marry nice girl from Quebec. De house is very neat. You mus' come veesit us in winter tam an see de

fellers feesh on de lak. I invite you. Don' ansult me by sayin' non."

As a matter of fact what could I do that was better?

"You're feelin' sad, boy?" said David when he saw me gloomily toying with my whiskey and soda. "You worried 'bout somet'ing? But I don' ask no questions," he added quickly with a native delicacy that I knew was characteristic.

Yes, what as a matter of fact could I do better than that? Of what use would a scandal be? The only painful question, said reason (but it was quickly contradicted by unreason) was that of the child. As for the other two, they could work out their destiny together. When I returned home I would offer Hannah a legal separation, alimony, and I would discuss with Mrs. O'Molloy how Baby Lucy could be taken care of. But that, that really was the painful problem.

After all, Hannah had returned to the man of her own race. It was human, tragically human.

When at the end of eight days I boarded the train for home I had decided upon a *modus vivendi* that seemed acceptable to me. Did the Canadian laws make divorce impossible? Oh well, Archer and Hannah would have to arrange for a divorce themselves. I would only ask her to cease using my name.

I would take care of Baby Lucy myself or I would board her out with Mrs. O'Molloy.

Then I would take a trip into David's country to see if it offered me any future. If I found nothing there I could easily return to my old profession of fur trading.

Yes, I know. I know that I had sworn never to return to the North again. But you know what the pledges of drunkards amount to!

It was in fact the end of one existence and the opening of a new one. I suffered without respite. So much the better. The pain that gnawed at my heart was a disguised blessing. The persistent and quenchless pain forced me to struggle to protect myself against it. It made me active, it made me do things I had never done before, it made me struggle.

The struggle! May it eternally exist!

Might I not in liberating myself from the hateful despotism of love rediscover that same stimulation toward living which I had discovered in the conquest of Hannah? Would it not be as it was of old, another but only slightly different game, with joy as the goal? Why should I despair? One leaves a struggle bruised and wounded, but exalted by the struggle and by it alone. To forget Hannah would be to manifest a deep power of forgetfulness. It would also prove a great luminous capacity. Yes, luminous! For

I must cast so much light between these shadowy memories and myself that human eyes would no longer be able to pierce it.

I did not doubt my power to succeed.

Jim Cowan, his snow-boots covered with mud, greeted me with a sarcastic smile.

"Has the horse been fed?" I asked him.

Jim spat tobacco juice before answering.

"That depends on his new owner," he muttered.

It required a moment or two before I understood.

"It's new owner? You don't mean to say you've sold it."

"No, damn it. What do you take me for? I only sell what belongs to me when I think I can make money on it. But I don't try to make money out of other people's property. There's a government in Canada." Then winking his eye, "Perhaps you're afraid to find out about something."

I grabbed Jim by the collar. He backed away from me and said calmly:

"Oh, you're stronger than I am, and from what people are saying, pretty quick on the trigger. As for me my heart's in the right place and besides, there's a government in Canada, and don't forget that."

"Get down to the point," I said with a curse. "I want my horse."

Jim broke into laughter.

"I haven't any horse belonging to you," he exclaimed.

"What do you mean? Would you swear to that?"

"On the Bible, Guv'ner, if you want me to."

"Jim! In my turn let me tell you that there's justice in Canada."

Jim grinned.

"We're in perfect agreement, Guv'ner. In perfect agreement. There's justice in Canada and it respects Old Jim, because Old Jim obeys the laws of the land. Old Jim isn't the horse thief you accuse him of being. Old Jim could sue you for libel for saying that. And you'd get what you deserve. If you had listened to Old Jim, you'd have heard a long time ago why Old Jim isn't responsible for that damn cayuse of yours. But you haven't wanted to listen to him. Old Jim hasn't anything more to say to you."

And grinning he turned as if to leave. In reality, of course, he wanted to be called back.

"But in the name of heaven, tell me!"

"I'd like to point out to you, Guv'ner, that a moment ago when I spoke. . . . "

"And told me nothing."

"Well, if you're going to interrupt me all the time."

"I'll keep still."

"That's a go!" (He touched the palm of my hand as if to seal a bargain.) "Well, in two words, here it is. The day after you took that pot shot at Archer and ran off. . . . "

"But I didn't take a shot at Archer. And I didn't run off."

"You can call it what you have a mind to. But I can't tell you the story if you keep breaking in all the time. . . . The day after you left these parts your missis came in and took the horse. She paid me for the oats and hay, so I couldn't say nothing. Then she sold it along with the rest of the horses and live stock to Tom Riddell of Prince Albert who was out here buying. Your horses completed the car load. I can't tell you what he paid for them. He never overpays, Guv'ner. It's not a habit of his, as you know. If your missis had asked me, you can bet I'd have given her a better price. But that's the way the world goes. Tom Riddell's a pretty sharp bargainer and there's very few can get around him. They're sweet on each other, eh?"

But I had become a madman and heard nothing more. I felt I must immediately see the O'Connors. Maggie, without doubt, could give me an explanation of the whole business.

O'Connor was in his store when I started up the outside stairs that led to Maggie's apartment on the second floor.

O'Connor must have seen me, for he hurried out and barred my way with his body.

"You can't go up there!" he exclaimed. "Nothing can make us open our house to a would-be murderer!"

"But look here, George! Come to! What you say is mad. It was just the reverse of that. Archer tried to kill. . . . "

O'Connor glanced at me with a sneer. His bony face that seemed to have been hewn out with a hatchet, broke into a grin. He cut my words short with a:

"Yes! It's always the meek who are wrong!"

Anger welled up within me like the waves of a rising sea.

"If you are a real man, George, you'll tell me that in the street!"

"Oh thanks! That means nothing to me. You show now what sort of a fellow you are. And if you say one word more, if you take one more step up these stairs, I'll have you arrested for forcible entry!"

Oh if I could have pounded that obstinate face into mince meat!

I arrived home after a long trudge through the snow, dragging my valise behind me and cursing my disordered mind for not thinking of hiring a sleigh from Jim. I found my house in utter chaos. One speaks of an indescribable confusion. The condition of my house was too easy to describe. As no one had taken the trouble to close the door, wind had filled the rooms with snow. The bureaus were as if disemboweled. Hannah had emptied them of all the linen and they had vomited out my own belongings. My precious books, strewn on the floor, torn and trodden on, had kept Baby Lucy amused while Hannah had packed the trunks. My own trunks had been taken. The kitchen utensils had been smashed on the floor. All the provisions were covered with filth as if a troop of monkeys had visited the pantry. No sheets or blankets remained on the beds. The stable had been denuded of live stock and harnesses. It was a most perfect picture of a house pillaged by barbarians and then abandoned by them. I perforce asked myself: Why the devil didn't they complete their task by setting it on fire? That at least would have helped me to forget about it. But now I had to struggle against something that urged me to repair the damage.

I took the road to the O'Molloy farm.

The bearded Irishman greeted me mournfully.

"It wasn't very nice, my lad, to have fired at Archer."

"But that is beginning to exasperate me!" I exclaimed. "I didn't fire at Archer! It was Archer who fired at me."

Old O'Molloy nodded his head.

"I would like to believe it," he said. "But Hannah says the contrary."

"And does Archer dare maintain that lie?" I asked.

"I must admit I haven't seen Archer," O'Molloy confessed in a low voice.

He was about to say more, but Tim entered the room and cast an angry glance in my direction.

"Here's Frenchy back again," he muttered, "with a lot of fine words and murder in his heart."

"Tim," said I, "shut up! I don't know what Hannah's been telling you."

"Don't you accuse an innocent girl!" croaked Mrs. O'Molloy.

"I don't know what she did tell you," I continued. "And I don't know what sort of a lie Archer cooked up for her. But first of all listen to my version patiently and without interrupting me. Then I'll listen to yours. I must find out where I stand."

Then as calmly as I could, I told them all the

facts in the case. While I spoke O'Molloy nodded his head and Tim murmured sympathetically, "Perhaps . . . perhaps . . . that might be." But Mrs. O'Molloy's expression remained surly and hostile. When I had finished she spat on the floor with desolating vulgarity and went out, slamming the kitchen door behind her. His eyes lowered, O'Molloy seemed striving to understand. Tim glanced toward me and exclaimed:

"Frenchy, would you swear to that? I would rather take your word than believe one of those fancy stories Archer told to hoodwink Hannah."

"So help me God!" said I, raising my hand.

"Do you hear that, father?"

I had returned once more into the lad's good favor. It would have been comical to anyone less interested in the affair than I.

"Do you hear that?" repeated Tim. "It's just another of Archer's dirty tricks. There isn't a lying word in all of Frenchy's story." (Two minutes before he had spoken of my "fine words" in an entirely different tone of voice, and I smiled in spite of myself.) "No, Frenchy has never been a liar and Archer made Hannah believe just what he wanted her to."

"Well, what *was* his story?" I asked. "It's high time I found out."

"Suppose that Archer had been in your place and you in his," replied Tim. "Archer accuses you of doing exactly what he did himself."

"Yes," said O'Molloy. "But it has all brought dishonor upon this house. She went away with him. . . ."

The room reeled as if with an earthquake. I had to master myself to murmur:

"And Baby Lucy?"

"God help her!" groaned O'Molloy. "They took her with them."

"And one more question," I said. "It's of no great importance though. My cattle and horses; did they sell them?"

"Hannah sold them. She thought you had fled, that you would never return."

"The devil with what she thought! It's Baby Lucy I want. Where are they?"

"Gone."

Becoming suddenly old, O'Molloy lowered his head.

Gone! Yes, gone! Without a trace behind!

As I was passing Grant's house, the old Scotchman hailed me.

"Hi there, Frenchy! What's this story I hear? I don't believe a word of it, to tell the truth. That red

headed son of a gun is just the kind who'd make a story up out of whole cloth so he could run off with his neighbor's wife. But the Scripture says: 'They that hate thee shall be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked shall come to nought.' "

They were the first cordial words I had yet heard and they had an unexpected effect. My eyes, dry until then, grew moist and a tear rolled down to the tip of my nose. Observing my tears, Grant exclaimed:

"Yes! Yes! The best sort of man has his troubles. But it is written, 'The Lord will not reject the upright man and he will not aid those who do evil.' Come, come, neighbor. My old woman probably can make a cup of tea for both of us. It will do a man no good to trudge waist deep through snow, lugging a heavy valise. No! No! Don't talk to me about these Irish. Everyone knows how hot they were for selling your live stock to old Riddell. And even if they didn't both leave on the same train, no one doubts that they were planning to join each other somewhere."

"But where?"

"God alone knows but perhaps He will set the police on them. Come. Come. Let's ask the old woman for a cup of tea. Remember the Scripture

how it says: 'Knowest thou not this of old since man was placed upon earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment?' Lord! Lord! What would we be in this world if we weren't assured of Justice? Come. Come. The old woman always has hot water ready for tea. And afterwards we'll see if two good Scotch horses can't take a friend to the station. . . ."

CHAPTER NINE

An Indian Tells Me

AT Winnipeg Attorney Stopwell received me in his offices on the fifth floor of a building on Main Street. The elevators were operated by young men who between trips spent their time studying the classics. As elevator boys they were working their way through college. In a few years they would also occupy the offices there, and surrounded by ponderous furniture of ebony and oak would compete with Attorney Stopwell, Dr. MacManus, and Dr. Lindsay the dentist, all of whose names, among many others, were inscribed in brass on the walls of the North American Building.

Attorney Stopwell listened with a grave and pompous air to the recital of my conjugal disaster. His beady eyes were lost behind huge, horn-rimmed glasses. He continually nodded his respectably bald head and punctuated each of my sentences with: "I see, I see,"—as if he fired them from a double-barrelled gun.

When I had completed my story he questioned me

with the glacial severity of a prosecuting attorney. Had I surprised the two accomplices in *flagrante delictu?* No? I see. I see. What proof could I give that the two lovers had departed together? None? I see. I see. Hem. Before anything could be done I must, as was customary in such cases, deposit a small retainer. Only a very small one was necessary. Could I deposit twenty dollars, say? For the immediate expenses of correspondence, etc.? I could? Very well. Yes. Hem. The best thing I could do was to hire a private detective. Mr. Stopwell, himself could put me in touch with an excellent one. Oh, of course. Completely confidential. Hem. But one was necessary to obtain definite proof of the complicity of the two . . . persons. Hem! The arsenal of laws, hem, of Canadian laws were, as I knew, the best anywhere. Hem! However, it must be admitted that they were made by men, *homo mendar,* which meant. . . . Oh, so I knew Latin! I see. I see. Hem. The arsenal of laws offered me the following weapons. . . .

Attorney Stopwell then offered to get the two accomplices condemned to prison, if, however, the detective could procure the proper evidence of the crime I accused them of, which he, Mr. Stopwell, did not doubt he could. Really! I did not wish to go so far? I see. I see. Otherwise divorce would be

difficult, very difficult to obtain. However, the sworn testimony of a detective. . . . It was necessary to begin drawing up the charges at once in conformity with. . . .

Mr. Richard Snitch, private detective, was a cold peremptory man who was very sure of himself. He asked for a description of the two fugitives and without any hesitation assured me that if they were somewhere in the underworld he would be able to find them in a few days. Slightly skeptical, I paid him the customary fee to cover his expenses.

There was, I told myself, a time for all things. To weep and to feel pain deeply is not an evil thing if you know how to abandon them when the time comes. And to that purpose, provided you are in good health, you always have the ready help of action. In a little time laughter will avenge you for pain.

Because I was obliged to see a number of business men in Winnipeg, and because Nature, to the point of the most perfect discipline, had taught me the *Primum vivere,* my pain now only sang in an undertone. Orchestrating the theme of my heart, the other passions, pride, anger, and all those necessary feelings that are in us, had assumed their functions

in the cruel symphony. Shared by so many instruments the symphony became easier for each one. So when I arrived at St. Hormidas and the Imperial Hotel (such was the pompous name of the establishment David was operating) I had recaptured that savage love of life that had been mine before. Henceforth what did it matter that Mr. Richard Snitch, detective, deceived in all his hopes as I had been deceived in mine, had been unable to find where Hannah and Archer were in hiding? Could it equal the drama on Lake Manitoba of men struggling, against winter?

David and I would not have been men after the heart of the West, men forever ready for action, if we had not entered this struggle. Unforeseen resurrection! This world in which progress and barbarism were so strangely fused, counseled us to join hands, just as centuries before it had counseled the barbaric races of the North who were our forefathers. If David had no idea what a corporation was, at least he knew as well as I did that in Union there is strength. I had arrived long enough ago from Europe, where the elite have forgotten to struggle for something other than extrinsic and often imaginary purposes, to have overturned the

values learned in childhood. For as Nature had sternly taught me, everything that does not work with us works against us. This had led me to eliminate all neutrality from my world. Associate or enemy, one must make choice between them. Moreover, I had succeeded in understanding that effort is what is best in this world. The efforts of two men are twice as good as that of one, while the efforts of twenty are twenty times as good. In conclusion we both realized all the expression means: to earn one's living. David and I had more than once conquered in a struggle with death. No, it was not one of those petty European games one plays according to rules in order to earn enough money to cut a slightly more brilliant figure. The stake of these petty struggles is vanity. But we who put all the chances on our side and who would have cheated if we had found occasion to do so, we indeed realized that in the terrible game we had always played, the stake in the last analysis was Life itself.

So on a sheet of paper we drew up the conditions of an association that had as purpose the buying and selling of fish. With our common funds we bought horses, dog teams, etc. As his hotel necessarily obliged David to live in St. Hormidas he took over the job of buying the fish while I left for Winnipeg to assure myself of a market.

The spectacle of the fisheries was a splendid testimony of human energy. Imagine the frozen lake, swept clear of snow by the wind, darkened and polished like slightly tarnished silver. The sky was pale and clear. The play of sunlight, the mocking and pallid images of the sun arranged in the form of a cross attested to the coldness of the temperature. On tiny prisms hovering in the air the shattered light glittered with each of the colors of its spectrum. This action formed an immense rosette towards the sky where four false suns surrounded the true one, joined to it by a fantastic Maltese cross. This cross was composed of bars of simple colors and the whole thing was circumscribed by an immense circle composed of all the colors of the rainbow. These colors with acrobatic swiftness followed one another at varying speeds. Upon touching the ice they fused into a many-colored glare of light, then, being reflected they paused a moment to fuse again into white light.

In this fairy-like scenery and to the incessant cannonade of splitting ice, our sleighs sped along with their jingling sleigh-bells. They sped toward that distant and implacable horizon where the sky bore down with all its weight upon the fragile ice, until they reached those deeper waters which Canadians, Icelanders, and half-breed fishermen violated for us.

The fishing shacks were about twelve feet square and built of rough planks. They were heated by small stoves to prevent the three foot hole chopped in the ice from freezing over. Within the hole splashed that dark, mysterious water from which we hauled out our nets.

They were gill-nets, and like long spider webs, we lowered them into the water through holes chopped every ten feet. Armed with a pole a fisherman would lower the net through the hole under the shack and then slide it beneath the ice to an uncovered hole ten feet away. Here an assistant would pass it along under the ice to the next one, until the last hole was reached. Then the rope attached to the net would be carried back to the original hole and made secure.

It was an arduous profession, for though the cold cut you like a knife, you were forced to thrust your bare arm into the water clear up to the shoulder. And when you would draw it from the water it would be covered with a stinging film of ice.

But who would be daunted by a little pain? For there was that moment when the nets were drawn and the fish, caught by their gills, struggled briefly in a last and ephemeral triumph of gold and silver. They would then be detached from the net and flung onto the ice where smitten by the merciful frost

they would be fixed in the last grotesque and tragic convulsions of agony. They were then piled in heaps according to their species and our teamsters would load them onto the sleds that all this death might be transmuted into dollars for the profit of our corporation.

All through the winter everything with a sort of cruel irony corroborated the proverb:— "Unlucky in love, lucky in money." I touched nothing, neither fish nor land, without changing it into bundles of bank notes.

I was not so fortunate with Mr. Snitch whose astuteness seemed to have failed him.

I finally grew weary of pouring money into his pocket with little expectation that he would succeed in discovering what had become of Archer, Hannah and Baby Lucy.

I tried three of his colleagues without better luck. Then convinced that the search was vain, I refused, for the time being at least, to pay wages to people who inspired me with no confidence.

It is very disconcerting to analyze one's feelings. When I tried to peer into the hateful past, I saw

myself, when the first moments of stupor had been overcome, as jealous. What? Had the red haired Irishman stolen Hannah from me? Did all that warmth and beauty I had known now belong to him? And jealousy became the natural reaction of a man who has been robbed of wealth. Then hate welled up. I had longed for bitter revenge, a desire that still rankled in my soul. Feeble as it had grown, it still seemed to flourish within me secretly; a guide, perhaps, to many acts that were strange in appearance. Yes, it had even produced that longing to amass wealth. But more than that, it had produced disgust. Two minutes after I had peered down into my past I would turn away that I might no longer smell its fetid odor. It seemed as if the corpse of Love rotted amid a pile of faded flowers. From this decomposing thing I little by little estranged myself. Doubtless I would have been able to estrange myself completely had the memory of Baby Lucy, amid all this death, not remained living.

This memory fostered not only an affection for the child, but a mixed feeling of jealousy, hate and scorn. Stronger than all else was my will to recapture her. I could not succeed in this without carrying along in the depths of my heart the three other emotions. So does a ship, speeding through the salt

sea, carry along an attendant wake full of all the impurities that have been torn from the depths.

Complete forgetfulness and total peace were therefore denied me.

The brilliant panorama of spring brought an end for a while to the diversion of fishing. A few days of inactivity threatened to submerge me. At once I felt that I was unconsciously comparing the spring of the year before with that of the present. The reality of the danger became evident. I no longer peered down into the past: the past rose towards me. I could only vanquish it by crushing it beneath a magnificent present. To enrich the actual moment I must therefore ceaselessly create. Simply at the price of a daily struggle, I could rear against the onslaughts of the past—however powerful they might be!—a forever victorious present.

This idea flung me at once into a whirlpool of activity. Business, the culture of the mind and body, fused in a fantastic ballet. I traveled by train for seventy-two hours on my way to examine a plot of land in one of those mushroom cities springing up in the West. During the trip I pored over maps and blue prints, studying the probabilities of future railroad lines. Had the section under consideration a chance of becoming the distributing point for a

vast region? Would banks, important wholesale houses be established there to supply the whole district? What chance was there of a rival city, completely obscure at present, rising three hundred miles away? Would it be wise to play both cards together? And to what an extent?

These problems did not prevent me from peering out the car window to observe the signs of prosperity the soil offered. Was the wheat sown thick? Were the houses neatly painted? Was the percentage of American immigrants—rich both in gold and experience—increasing? The conversation of travelers who boarded the train at various stations supplied me with a never-failing source of information.

It is difficult to realize completely the richness of such a life. Before my eyes lay the genesis of a magnificent country. The triumphant song of Canadian prosperity rang in my ears. It was a magnificent conquest of Nature by the Will. Human energy defeated the massive inertia of matter. Even the climate was forced to change under the continual exertions of men.

For the first time the glory of the Dominion in which I was but a grain of dust appeared to me in all its splendor.

It already required an effort of will to picture this country as it was before the Canadian Pacific had stretched forth its voracious antennae from one ocean to the other.

Thus in less than thirty years a few men, a few leaders of the people, had transformed this desert into a rich country. An entire race had disappeared in the struggle, for of the Sioux, Crees and Blackfoots there remained only a few remnants. Their race was destined to complete disappearance before the tireless efforts of the white man.

But consider all those immigrants from the old country whom Canada dragged from the miserable slums of London or from Breton poverty!

It was a magnificent work of charity in behalf of European sickness. Yes, it was something the faith of a few capitalists and the rude will of a few statesmen had achieved for Canada!

Toward the beginning of fall, David took me with him on a pilgrimage to the Province of Quebec where his parents still lived.

We passed a few days in a little village that sprawled along the banks of the Saint Lawrence, a river that offers the most marvelous vistas in the world. It was downstream from Quebec, at a place where the river assumes gigantic proportions. Im-

mense islands broke the current and far beyond we could distinguish through the mists the lofty mountains leaning amorously over the north bank. And it was all enlivened by ships.

But as lovely as the landscape was, I did not bother much about it. For I had before me the thrilling symbols of Canadian history.

The inhabitants of the place were named: Ledoux, Leblanc, Lecavalier, Laframboise, Lespérance, Laflamme, Laflèche, Lajeunnesse, Belhumeur, Lajoie, Beauparlant. It was as if some fantastic drum had called all the veterans of the Carignan regiment from their tombs to pass in review before contemporary Canada. Le Clerc, Lechasseur, Lepage, Lemarchand, Sansregret, Sanssouci, Casgrain, Pelletier, Lamalice —and the earliest settlers rose before my eyes with their trades or their characteristics. Thus all the history of three centuries was inscribed in a score of names of traders, clerks, or laborers. At a distance of two hundred and fifty years these men bore witness of their fathers' strength.

Other names were not less charged with history: Montigny, Boucherville, Roquebrune, Tascherie forced me to learn the annals of that semi-feudal Christianity which had been built up in this new France as "the bees make hives."

And suddenly Canadian energy took on all its historical importance. It moved on slowly, deliberately, without useless effort, with all that patience with which the mother-land influenced world civilization.

Laurier, Adelard Turgeon, Bourassam Lemieux, Lomer Gouin, put order, clarity, generosity and harmony into all political parties.

I also violently reversed the ignorant and hasty judgments all the French of the old country have held toward their Canadian brothers from the earliest days; a judgment the old country has too long refused to abandon.

I was so near the Plains of Abraham that I was forced to learn history. And the names of the counties rang gloriously in my ears with the rhythm of the great names of the epoch: Montmagny, Champlain, Maisonneuve, Talon, Montmorency, Laval, Lévis, Vaudreuil, La Salle, Marquette. . . .

While the glory of French Canada in all its physical and historical splendor was being revealed to me, my activity took a new form.

A cousin of David, encountered behind a foaming glass of beer, questioned me concerning the fur trade. He himself was an able fur dealer. He had offices in the old French city of Quebec and his

check was honored by all the banks there. When he told me that he was planning to extend his field of business into Northern Ontario and asked if I cared to act as his agent there, I accepted without hesitation.

My real estate investments in the West would not bring me in a profit for some time to come. And the fishing business David and I had started could go along without me, for I had contracted with dealers to take all the fish we could send them. Northern Ontario was almost unknown to me; I had only seen it from the train window on my way from North Bay to Lake Superior. But what I had seen was enough to tempt both my love of adventure and the need I felt of stretching my legs. As for that bleak land of Athabaska where Paul Durand had perished from exhaustion, no! I would never return there again. But Ontario was a new country and there I would not grow dizzy from peering down into a past that was deep . . . too deep.

Again, the ceaseless fight with cold. But it was a less fierce cold than that of Athabaska, if one measured it by the thermometer. Sheltered within its cylinder of glass the liquid descended respectfully. It evinced no desire to cower trembling in the depths of its little cave. But the air was muggy and

humid and it seemed as if all the fogs of Hudson Bay, driven on by the north wind, longed to take refuge between your clothing and your skin. They penetrated your clothes, however tightly you buttoned yourself up. The fogs condensed beneath your underclothes, pouring down over your body and stealing all its precious warmth. They stole the warmth from your chest, from your back, from your arms. They clung heavily to your shoulders. They climbed down your arms. They slid along your sleeves into your mittens. They gnawed your hands to the bone. They stripped the skin from your fingers. They snapped your knuckles.

But it was when you were getting up that the icy fog took most advantage of your weakness. You would seem to be half awake. Your numb hands would be unable to buckle the dogs' harness. And all during the first few hours of mushing, weighted down with silence, cold and fog, you were forced to struggle constantly to recapture all the precious functions of your being.

Later it would seem as if the curtain of mist that hung between you and the forest was rising slowly. The blue-gray pines, the deep blue cedars would come toward you in all their majesty. Your joints would become limber again. Your ankles would swing the snow-shoes along swiftly. You

would scatter the snow like eiderdown, sending little bright flakes of it flying all around you.

Far off in the distant south the sun would touch the fog with a magician's wand. The snow would no longer be mauve. Each of the facets of its little hexagons would glitter with one of the colors of the spectrum. If you paused a moment to give the dogs a rest and to light your pipe, you would see the colors in their proper places, red opposite green, blue opposite orange, violet opposite yellow. It was like catching a magician in his trick. But should you be inattentive you would see only those innumerable gems clinging to the trees behind that unreal and shifting gauze where the six colors were reflected in a softer tone. How can one refrain from madly loving the magnificent winter that one has had so much trouble in vanquishing?

Thereafter days would come when the snow would fall silently, bending down the branches of trees. And you would sink noiselessly into drifts of stainless wool, and so noiselessly would you travel that you would suddenly confront a herd of caribou who, startled, would disappear into the thickets, leaving behind a cloud of white flakes like swan's-down.

Then the cold would return. The snow would squeak beneath your snow-shoes and your sleds.

The thick vapor of your breath would condense upon your beard and disgusting icicles would dangle before your mouth. You would feel that you were losing weight and that you were rapidly burning up your precious reserve strength. If you should have luck at hunting you would construct a temporary shelter with poles and skins, where, protected from the snow you would rest for days squatting before a little fire that would seem to be almost non-existent, but which would supply you with precious warmth. Surrounded by your dogs you would eat until benevolent night drove you to your blankets.

Northern Ontario was less sparsely settled than the Northwest. I frequently ran across fresh snow-tracks. Or perhaps in the slightly fantastic half light of the woods I would see an Indian trapper moving across the snow like a ghost.

They were members of the Chippewa race, the best trappers and woodsmen that exist, and also the most adroit handlers of a canoe. But this was the season when the birch bark canoes, turned upside down, slumbered on two logs. And the rapids the Chippewas ran, writhed powerless beneath their prison of unyielding ice.

These Indians worked for the long established firms: the Hudson Bay Company and Revillon

Frères to whom they were bound by debts. And there is hardly a Chippewa who does not faithfully pay in furs for the tobacco, flour, cloth and powder he has bought the preceding summer. This naturally restricts the field of a trader. But there are always many trappers who are free from debts and who will promise you their furs for the next winter.

It was these meetings with the Indians that put my diplomacy as a white man to a rigorous test. I myself knew what the Indian did there. But he, entirely ignorant of my purpose, was apt to consider me an undesirable citizen in his little realm. And he was obliged to form his own opinion of me before admitting me into his confidence.

After he had greeted me with a double "B'jou! B'jou!" he would sit down at my side on the trunk of a fallen tree. Then he would accept the tobacco I offered as a sign of friendship. I would modestly lower my eyes while he filled his pipe. This he would perform slowly, stopping every now and then to cast an eye in the direction of my tracks, or to note the condition of my dogs, my clothing, or to observe the cut of my moccasins and the shape of my snow-shoes. Then after a long silence, crowned regally in smoke, but during which I would be un-

able to decipher the evolution of his thoughts upon his impassive face, he would suddenly ask me:

"Where do you come from?"

When I had answered his pertinent question as to the point of my departure, he would lapse into silence, attempting to guess what business brought me there. But he would avoid asking me the question directly.

Then I would cautiously lead the conversation to the subject, trying to find out how much the rival companies paid for furs, discreetly setting forth the advantages a new competitor might offer to a trapper who had a large family to support. But I would at the same time avoid any unfavorable criticism of rival firms. Little by little the Indian would become interested and my heart would beat with joy when I realized that I had just won a point in the game I played against the old firms that ruled the forests of the North.

Toward the end of March I happened to be in that section where the water-courses under their armor of ice strive to pour their mingled floods into Hudson Bay. Warm rains had goffered the snow, tinged it with yellowish gray, melted it, and swept it down into the gullies. The rain had also freed the rivers from their prisons and formed new tor-

rents that dragged along trees the autumn storms had half uprooted. It was the season of young and plundering spring.

In his hut of poles and bark an old Indian offered me his hospitality while I waited to exchange my dogs for a canoe to carry me back home. At the end of a few days he suddenly became confidential.

"Northwest from here," he said "there's another white man who is doing the same thing you are. It's his second winter in the woods and he is beginning to learn how to buy furs. Last year he made us all laugh, for anyone could have seen that he didn't know anything about furs. But you can't say that all white men are stupid. No, you really can't say they are! This fellow I'm telling you about learned very quickly. You'll find that he's a very active competitor. I tell you that because you're my guest and because I like you."

"But you don't like him?"

"Oh, yes. He's not a bad fellow. He isn't a scamp. But you're a better friend of mine. Besides, you're a good woodsman. But this white man isn't disagreeable and my people like him a lot."

"What sort of a man is he?"

My red friend reached out and I at once handed

him some tobacco. He winked an eye by way of thanking me, and said:

"He's a fellow with fiery hair and with eyes like bits of a spring sky. He's one of those Englishmen they call Irish. He has his wife and two children with him. The younger one was born in the woods, just as winter was beginning."

Though there are a great many Irishmen in the world something plucked at my heart when I asked the Indian:

"What name does he go by?"

"We call him Dog Wood because of the color of his hair. But white men call him something else. There are those who call him O'Donahue (my memory isn't very good, though). But his wife calls him ah . . . ah . . . Ahchie or something like that."

"And he, what does he call his wife?"

"Wait! He calls her da—a—ling."

"But that's not a name. That's a term of endearment."

"I haven't ever heard him call her anything else. But wait! Yes, once he said when he was angry, Ha . . . a . . . annah."

"And are you sure his name is O'Donahue?"

The Indian glanced toward me.

"How should I know? Up here everyone calls

himself what he pleases. As far back as I can remember, and the sun has revolved around the earth many times since, I have changed my name four times. Names, you know, are like moccasins. When they are worn out you have to get another pair. I don't see why you white men keep your names for so long. Since he's been here, his name has been O'Donahue, and that's all I know about it. The little girl, the older one, I don't know her name but I'm sure she isn't his daughter."

"Why do you think that?"

"How could she be? The man I'm telling you about and his wife, both have eyes the color of the sky. And the little one that was born at the beginning of winter has eyes the same color, too. But the other girl has eyes the color . . . how can I describe them? Yes, the color of bark. She has eyes just like yours."

Certainly there had been no cataclysm. And yet all sorts of things, the Indian, a frying pan, furs drying on their stretchers, the poles of the hut, and other things too, almost forgotten people, whirled before my eyes as if an explosion had flung them into the air.

Through breathless questions flung at the old Indian, slightly disconcerted by my sudden extrava-

gance, I learned beyond every suspicion of a doubt that chance, more skillful than Mr. Snitch the detective, had revealed at last where Hannah and Archer were hiding.

CHAPTER TEN

The Stream to the Cross

EVEN though I knew the speed at which Indians travel there was something disconcerting about the swiftness with which news circulated in a country apparently lacking in all means of communication.

Though I hastened on as rapidly as possible, crossed mile after mile of wild country, waded through rushing torrents, plunged through half flooded forests, climbed hills covered with damp and mushy snow where I sank waist deep, though I did all this, I nevertheless arrived at an abandoned cabin. That the flight had been precipitate was evident from a thousand and one little details, the most pathetic of them all being the forgotten comb on which remained a strand or two of that beautiful yellow hair that I had loved to caress. A feeling rose in me that I had believed was entirely extinguished.

I had received too sudden a shock and I had traveled too swiftly to have reached a clear idea of

what I would do when I found myself face to face with my rival. Even my purpose was not clear to me. But suddenly all became light. What very distant ancestor suggested his brutal advice to me? Yes, I would challenge Archer to mortal combat and when I had killed him (yes, killed him, I repeated the word in savage joy) I would carry off my wife as a recaptured possession. And henceforth her fate would be to submit to my will. There was something about this idea that reminded me of the delicious taste of blood one drinks from the cut throat of a slaughtered beast, when hunger has tormented one for days on end and when one feels it voraciously tearing at one's bowels. It was equally gratifying to avenge myself upon Archer (and also upon Hannah) by killing him and then sardonically enjoying my triumph by recapturing the love—or the desire?—of the woman. I did not for a moment doubt that she would search even into the palms of my hands for the smell of his blood. For it was for his sake that she had broken all the lives that were attached to her. Doubtless all this was perversity on my part. But I, too, had a right—did I not? —to my share of this world's happiness. And so much the worse for anyone who forced me to recapture it by violence.

The course of their flight lay along a river which at that time of the year boiled with spring freshets under the vaulted arches of pines and cedars. Their canoe engraved the story of their flight upon the sand. I, too, must procure a canoe.

To purchase one from the Indians whose camp was only a few miles away struck me as being beyond the possibilities of diplomacy. That Archer had been warned so quickly proved that he must have been really liked by the Indians of that section. Otherwise, for I realized that they held themselves aloof from the quarrels of white men, they would have regarded the affair from a distance, silently, but with an almost imperceptible smile lurking in the corners of their slanting eyes.

However, it was not beyond my powers to construct a seaworthy craft myself and I at once set about building one. With the aid of an axe and fire one can easily fashion and bend the roots of tamarack into ribs. Once the framework is completed and tightly bound together with rawhide—it did not take me long to shoot a deer in this land where game was abundant—I cut and sewed the covering of birch bark which I stretched over the frame. A maple furnished me with wood for paddles. In fifteen hours I had constructed a canoe, less well balanced, indeed, than if it had been made

by the careful Chippewas, but capable of carrying me along any stream whatsoever. In spite of everything, the advantage was on my side.

It was a slightly wanton act of mine, that of burning down Archer's cabin. However, it sated the new man that had been shocked into life within me and which commanded me to destroy. When the flames had finally gnawed into the roof and it fell with a blinding crash of sparks, I even emitted a cry of triumph.

The river flowed along a rocky bed. Carried swiftly along by the current I could not travel for more than three miles at a time without coming to rapids. An Indian could have run the rapids with his canoe, but neither Archer nor I were skillful enough to do so. He had left signs of his flight at every rapids and these signs created a strange emotion in me. For side by side with the footprints of Archer and Hannah—those of Hannah were deep because of the baby she carried—were marks of little feet that could have been none other than those of Baby Lucy.

But I had no reason to linger over them. At each of the portages I gained considerable time on the fugitives. A portage that took them twenty minutes to make, took me only ten. At the end of the third

day I felt that I was close upon them. Hope, hate, and desire danced a fantastic ballet in my heart.

Towards noon on the third day I discovered that I had lost their trail. During a portage I looked in vain for footprints. I then remembered that some miles upstream I had noticed a small tributary entering the stream at a sharp angle. Without doubt they had turned and made their way up it.

It was an exasperating piece of bad luck, for I was now obliged to paddle for three or four miles against a raging stream in whose current paddles would have been useless. I had therefore to shove my way back with poles and that is no easy task. But I cut down two young ash trees and fell to work.

It was just as I had expected. At hardly more than two hundred feet from the point where the tributary joined the river, there was a wild rapid whose running foam danced under my eyes. Yes, on the banks there were freshly made footprints.

But I had lost half a day.

The tributary was not so deep as the main stream. In the water which rose to my waist I advanced more rapidly, pushing my canoe before me. But it was a chilling task and when evening came and I had lighted my fire, I really felt like another man,

one who was more eager for warmth than for vengeance.

Voices sounded under the vaulted forest. They were Indian voices and I did not consider it necessary to lay aside the piece of dry meat I was broiling and see who they were. An Indian family appeared, knowing the place to be a good one to pitch camp in, and without honoring me with a glance installed themselves about a hundred paces away.

I watched them pull their canoes up on land. Then two squaws, their heads and shoulders wrapped in striped shawls, started a fire. The two men squatted against a tree and smoked.

One of them finally decided to visit me. After greeting me with the traditional "B'jou! B'jou!" he stood for a long time, silently studying my canoe and my steaming clothes. Without saying a word I offered him tobacco. He smoked. When he had finished smoking, he rose, nodded to me, and went off.

We had not exchanged more than two words, except for the "B'jou" which was both ceremonious and familiar. But if he had asked me no questions, his observations had told him everything. The light pack I carried bespoke a hasty expedition. And I was certain that everyone in this section of the woods now knew that a white man was pursuing Archer.

I had been careful not to ask a question myself, for I knew I would be answered with a lie.

Heralded by two amorous wolves and by the melancholy whippoorwill, night descended. But even the bird's voice was finally stilled and there was no longer a living sound heard save for the secretive and crystalline murmur of the river and the crackling fires of the white man and the red men.

I remember that I slept a little, at least long enough for my fire to burn out. The chill of the night air awoke me. I rose quietly and groping my way I climbed down the river bank to the sandy shore where I had drawn up my canoe. Between the black wall formed by the bank and the equally black river, the shore lay like a gleaming band of light. While awaiting dawn I paced up and down the shore to keep warm.

My silent walk led me almost under the Indian camp where a fire still flickered feebly. Suddenly I heard the sound of dry wood being broken, and a moment later sparks rose in the night as if to rejoin the stars. On the opposite bank fantastic shadows danced. A sleeper had doubtless awakened. A moment later I heard someone stirring and a voice muttered in Chippewa:

"That you, son?"

"Yes, it's me, father. I've put wood on the fire. The white man's fire is out."

"The white man has traveled far and he is exhausted. His legs will be stiff tomorrow when he continues his pursuit of the man with the red hair."

"That is a good thing. The red haired man is our friend. When my wife was sick the white woman came to sit with her and drive off the Evil Spirit."

"All the same, son, be careful of getting mixed up with white men's quarrels. The damage they do to each other is always enough."

"My father is wise. But one word of warning to a friend might save his life. Dog Wood does not know that his enemy is so near."

"Yes, yes. But he flees swiftly."

"Swifter than the woman's strength and that of his two children should permit."

"Yes, for the child's sake she wants to make a halt. But when she protested against continuing, Dog Wood raised a whip above her as if she were a beast and he shouted, 'Move on!' "

"But certainly he would never have struck her."

"Yes! He flees for his life, it seems to me. The white man pursues him for revenge."

"It's not our business."

"Yes, yes. It's not our business. But let me tell you the other white man is a terribly strong man."

"Dog Wood told me that he can jump his own height."

"I knew a warrior in the old days when Chippewas were men, who could do that. However, this white man is not tall, but his chest is thick as a bear's."

"Let's call him Masquah (the Bear) for that reason."

"And Masquah, Dog Wood also told me, is a fine shot and a good woodsman. At any rate he has come along more swiftly than I believed it possible for a white man."

"Yes, but you yourself said that his legs will be stiff tomorrow."

"Did I say that? It's possible. However, he's a husky man. After all he may be able to follow their trail."

"Yes, but Dog Wood has a good start on him. He can go along the old Indian road and find a canoe waiting for him in the other stream. Masquah will have to portage his canoe."

"Count two full days ahead for Dog Wood."

"Why doesn't he go to the Hudson Bay Company or the Mounted Police for protection?"

"Perhaps the Mounted Police don't like Dog

Wood. Besides, there's only one thing that a man of our race will never understand. And that is the 'Why' of a white man."

"But the little girl who is sick, how can she . . . ?"

What had I heard? Sick? Sick? Baby Lucy sick?

All desire for revenge immediately was quenched within me. I had a sole desire now—and I felt my nerves become so taut that they seemed ready to break one after the other with the sound of broken violin strings—a single desire: to reach them, to halt the pursuit, to shout to Archer, "No! No! Flee no farther! Neither you nor Hannah need have any more fear of me. But for the love of God, don't let the child die! My child!"

The ebb and flow of hope foamed in my heart, as events hastened my pursuit or retarded it. I followed the old Indian trail, hardly perceptible in the half light of the forest, with sufficient good luck. But when I reached the western bank of the river and attempted to drop my canoe into the water, my foot slipped. The frail craft struck a jagged rock that gauged a hole in it. I then had to search for a large birch tree, peel off some bark, sew it with rawhide, and batten the seams with tallow. But my mind was far from my body. The cord of will that

binds them both together had been stretched too far and its elasticity had gone. I had lost another half day. Archer now had three full days' advance upon me.

It was on the third evening after I had repaired the canoe and had descended mile after mile down the turbulent stream, that I came upon the place where they had camped. What did those confused footprints matter to me, those footprints that could have told me the tragic story? I repulsed as sacrilege the temptation of searching for a feminine pain equal, without doubt, to mine and perhaps heightened by poignant remorse. All that I now saw was, planted above the freshly dug earth of that barren knoll, a pine board roughly hewn with an axe and branded with a cross and with a name:

LUCY MONGE

A man has scanned his past!

THE END

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14 DAY BOOK

CLOSED STACKS

c.2

Constantin-Weyer

close stack

Man scans the past

CLOSED STACKS

c.2

Constantin-Weyer

Man scans his past

Dead Storage

285-AAY-086